



LOG HORIZON

夜明けの迷い子

橙乃ままれ 著 ハラカズヒロ 画



夜明けの迷い子

6

橙乃ままれ

TOUNO, MAMARE



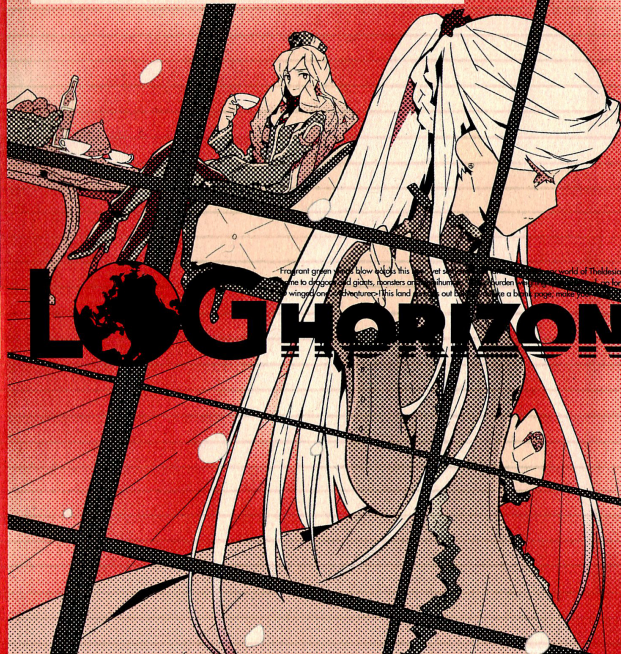
ログ・ホライズン



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LOG HORIZON

橙乃ままれ既刊作品

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▶ ログ・ホライズン 1 異世界のはじまり

▶ ログ・ホライズン 2 キャメロットの騎士たち

▶ ログ・ホライズン 3 ゲームの終わり [上]

▶ ログ・ホライズン 4 ゲームの終わり [下]

▶ ログ・ホライズン 5 アキバの街の日曜日

▶ ログ・ホライズン 6 夜明けの迷い子

以下続刊

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アカツキは顔を隠すように渚でくると舞う。
キャメルブラウンのコートの裾をふわりと広げる
自分はきっと微笑んでいる。
シロエはそんなアカツキを振り返って
すこし待ってくれた。



ログ・ホライズン4巻で実施した
キャラクター人気投票

- 1位 アカツキ
- 2位 シロエ
- 3位 にゃん太
- 4位 ミノリ
- 5位 ルンデルハウス



のべ投票数 5090 票
たくさんの投票ありがとうございました!!!
▶結果詳細はP312 へ!

LOG HORIZON

Fragrant green winds blow across this new, yet somehow old land. The imaginary world of Theldesia is home to dragons and giants, monsters and demihumans. With a burden weighing upon your soul, go forth, O winged one <Adventurer>! This land spreads out before you like a blank page; make your mark in it!

ログ・ホライズン

6 夜明けの迷い子

橙乃ままれ

006



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AFTERWORD

腹ぐるろ眼鏡



伝説のフレイ集団（放蕩者の茶会）で参謀役を務めていた思索派の〈付与術師〉。精神的引きこもりで人との関わりを避けていたが、〈大災害〉を経て、自身のギルド〈記録の地平線〉を設立。

美少女暗殺者



アカツキ

以前は性別を隠し、寡黙な男性としてフレイしていたが、〈大災害〉後は、現実世界と同じ姿を取り戻す。助けてくれたシロエを主君と呼んで慕っている。〈記録の地平線〉所属。

中学生巫女



ミノリ

マジメで責任感の強い性格で、活発で無茶をしがちな弟トウヤの世話をやく。〈記録の地平線〉に所属し、恩師たるシロエの背中を見つめ、学び追いつこうと努力の日々。

ぐうたら姫



レイネシア

マイハマの街を治める〈大地人〉貴族の姫君。儂げな美少女の見た目とは裏腹に、その実はお風呂さえ厭う天性の面倒くさがり。侍女のエリッサにその不精を叱られることもたびたび。

アキバのひまわり



マリエール

中堅フレイヤー支援ギルド〈三日月同盟〉のギルドマスター。関西弁を使うちやきやきの姉御肌の〈施療神官〉。分け隔てなく接するその態度で、男女を問わずファンは多い。

敏腕会計士



ヘンリエッタ

〈三日月同盟〉所属で、同ギルドのギルドマスター・マリエールとは、女子高時代からの親友。かわいい女の子に目がなく、特にアカツキをおもちゃにして楽しんでいる。

ゲームの世界に閉じ込められた〈大災害〉から半年。

アキバの街の〈冒険者〉たちは自治組織「円卓会議」を設立し、自らの手で「天稗祭」なるお祭りを開催。

半年の間にたくさんの技術革新が生まれ、祭りは盛況に迎えるが、その最中に円卓会議というアキバのシステムを狙った事件が発生。

「情報戦」が繰り広げられ、シロエは対応におわれる。

異変を察知したミノリも「自分のやれること」でシロエに協力。

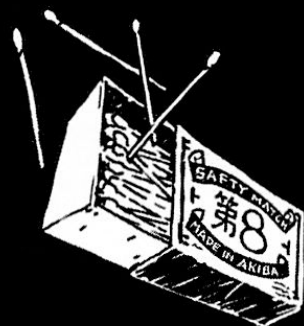
大地人の姫・レイネシアのピンチも彼らの活躍で乗り越え、「情報戦」を無事制することに成功する。

一方、アカツキは、事件とお祭りを通して中学生であるはずのミノリの機転とシロエへの思いを目の当たりし、強い

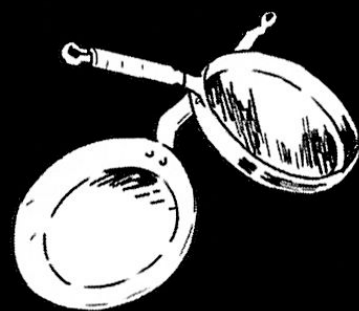
シヨックを覚える。

ミノリの存在が、「シロエとともに歩む」と疑いもなく決めていたアカツキの心に焦燥と戸惑いを芽生えさせ……。

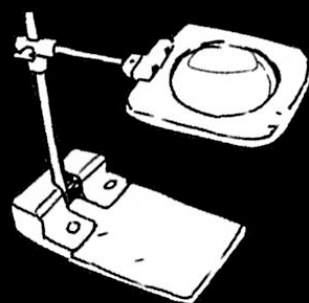




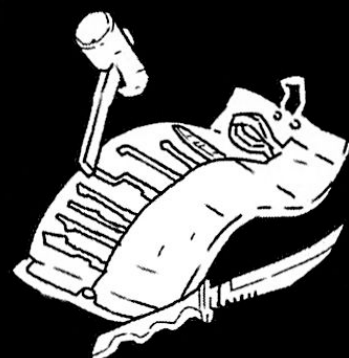
〈マッチ〉
簡単に火をつけるアイテム。
火は文明人になるための
一里塚だ!



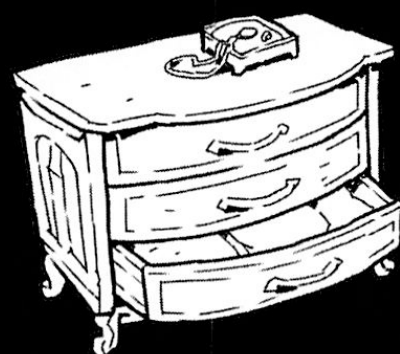
〈フライパン〉
〈冒険者〉はニヤセ
食器代わりに食事する。
野外でのジャスティス。



〈拡大鏡〉
どんな痕跡も見逃さないという
偏執的な観察狂の愛用品。
たまに科学に寄与する。



シーツール
〈盗賊道具〉
どう見ても犯罪者用だが
アキバの街では
正義の盗賊向けに販売中。



〈衣装棚〉

さまざまな衣装を
収納すると共に、
マニアックな盗賊視察では
宝箱となる。

MAIN CLASSES

IT DECIDES THE PLAYERS' BATTLE ABILITY IN ELDER TALE. WHEN A PLAYER STARTS THE GAME, THEY CAN CHOOSE FROM 12 UNIQUE CLASSES, CATEGORIZED INTO WARRIOR CLASSES, WEAPON-BASED CLASSES, HEALER CLASSES AND MAZE CLASSES. THERE ARE 3 CLASSES FROM EACH CATEGORY, A TOTAL OF 12.

SUBCLASSES

HAVE NO DIRECT RELATION TO BATTLING, BUT A CONVENIENT SKILL TO HAVE WHILE PLAYING THE GAME. COMPARED TO THE 12 CLASSES, THERE ARE OVER 50 SUBCLASSES, FROM CONVENIENT JOBS TO JOKE SUBCLASSES, IT HAS A WIDE VARIETY MIXED IN.

AKIBA CITY

ONE OF THE PLAYER CITIES IN YAMATO. IT'S POSITION IS RELATIVE TO REAL JAPAN'S AKIBA.

CRESCENT ARCHIPELAGO YAMATO

THE WORLD OF SERGESEA IS BASED ON THE REAL WORLD. CRESCENT ARCHIPELAGO YAMATO IS EQUIVALENT TO THE REGION OF JAPAN, DIVIDED INTO EZZO EMPIRE, FOUPLAND DUKEDOM, NINETAL DOMINION, LEAGUE OF FREEDOM CITIES EASTAL AND HOLY EMPIRE WESTELAND. THESE 5 AREAS.

CAST TIME

THE TIME NEEDED TO PREPARE BEFORE ACTIVATING A SKILL. IT DIFFERS FROM SKILL TO SKILL. POWERFUL SKILLS USUALLY HAVE LONGER CAST TIME. YOU CAN MANEUVER WHILE CASTING COMBAT SKILLS, BUT ANY MAGICAL SPELLS WILL BE INTERRUPTED IF YOU MOVE WHILE CASTING.

WOLIOZ BIZO

THE EFFECT OF UNABLE TO MOVE YOUR BODY TEMPORARILY AFTER USING A SKILL. UNABLE TO MOVE OR ACT UNTIL SKILL STIFFNESS WEARS OFF.

RECAST TIME

AFTER USING A SKILL, THE TIME NEEDED TO USE IT AGAIN. THIS RESTRICTION PREVENTS PLAYERS FROM SPAMMING A SPECIFIC SKILL. SOME SKILLS HAVE THE RESTRICTION OF USING IT ONCE PER DAY.

COOL DOWN

ONE OF THE BASIC SKILLS ALL ADVENTURERS CAN LEARN. CAN INSTANTLY TELEPORT TO THE LAST VISITED SAFE ZONE WITH A CATHEDRAL. HAVE A COOL DOWN OF 34 HOURS.

RAID

REQUIRES MORE ADVENTURERS THAN THE STANDARD PARTY OF 6 TO BATTLE, ALSO USED TO DESCRIBE A LARGE GROUP OF PLAYERS. MOST WELL KNOWN ARE THE 34 PLAYERS' FULL RAID AND THE 96 PLAYERS' LEGION RAID.

RACE

THE WORLD OF SERGESEA HAS ALL KINDS OF HUMANOID RACES. ADVENTURERS CAN CHOOSE HUMAN, ELF, DWARF, HALF-ELF, WERECAT, WOLF-PAN, FOXTAIL AND RACE OF CEREMONY. THESE 8 RACES, KNOWN AS THE KIND HUMAN RACES.

MAIN CLASSES

MAGIC ATTACK CLASSES



SORCERER

STRONG AT DEALING DIRECT DAMAGE TO OPPONENTS.



SUMMONER

STRONG AT SUMMONING AND MANIPULATING MYTHICAL BEASTS AND SPIRITS.



ENCHANTER

STRONG AT THE CONTROL OF BATTLE STATUS AND MP.

HEALING CLASSES



CLERIC

THE ULTIMATE HEALER BOASTING OF THE GREATEST HEALING ABILITY.



DRUID

A MAGIC-TYPE HEALING CLASS THAT ALLIES WITH THE NATURAL AND SPIRITS



KANNAGI

A PREVENTIVE-TYPE HEALING CLASS THAT BLOCKS OFF DAMAGE.

WEAPON ATTACK CLASSES



ASSASSIN

A PURE ATTACKER PROFICIENT IN THE USE OF DIVERSE WEAPONS.



SWASHBUCKLER

TAKES UP A GUERRILLA-LIKE POSITION. DUEL-WIELDING AND VERSATILE



BARD

A LIGHT-ARMORED WARRIOR FLUENT IN MANY "SONGS" OF MAGICAL EFFECTS.

WARRIOR CLASSES



GUARDIAN

WIELDS THE HIGHEST DEFENSIVE ABILITY AND ABILITIES THAT GATHERS ENEMIES BY AGGRO.



SAMURAI

USES JAPANESE-STYLED EQUIPMENT, AND WIELDS POWERFUL SKILLS.



MONK

A BALANCE CLASS THAT LACKS ARMAMENTS BUT EXCELS IN EVASION.



おっかやまでした
ク巻につづく

ハイガネコロ

▶ログ・ホライズン

⑥ 夜明けの迷い子

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公式サイト：<http://www.mamare.net>

▶MASUDA Shoji

ゲームデザイナーとして『リングキューブ』、『俺の屍を越えてゆけ』などを制作。小説家としても活躍し、『鬼切り夜鳥子』シリーズや『ハルカ』シリーズ、『ジョン&マリー ふたりは賞金稼ぎ』、『傷だらけのビーナ』などを発表。最新作は児童書に初挑戦した『透明の猫と年上の妹』。そのほかの著書に『ゲームデザイン脳 榊田省治の発想とワザ』がある。

ツイッターアカウント：ShojiMasuda

▶HARA Kazuhiro

逗子在住。家庭用ゲーム開発出身。イラストのほか漫画、デザインなどで活動中。最近は散歩の時にパイオカイトで風揚げするのが楽しいです。『ログ・ホライズン』のコミカライズも手がけ、『ログ・ホライズン①』（ファミ通クリアコミックス）が好評発売中。またコミッククリアのサイトに現在も好評連載中。

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LOG HORIZON

謎の取材!!
平泉へ
ままれ
橙乃

もうひとつの物語。

6巻は、静かな渚でアカツキがシロエに出会った。

7巻は、同じ場所でシロエがアカツキに出会う。



▼デミグレス



▼直継



▼シロエ



▼天星



▼マサチューセツ

ログ・ホライズン

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2013 年 秋 発 売 予 定

7

CHAPTER.



MURDERER

[殺 人 鬼]

▶ NAME: TATARA

▶ LEVEL: 90

▶ RACE: DWARF

▶ CLASS: SAMURAI

▶ HP: 13421

▶ MP: 6710

▶ ITEM 1:

[SMOKY QUARTZ GOGGLES]

SEMI-TRANSPARENT BLACK QUARTZ FIT IN ELABORATE GOGGLES THAT BLOCKS OUT INTENSE LIGHT. ALTHOUGH THE ITEM GIVES A BONUS WHEN CREATING CLAY ITEMS USING THE FURNACE, TATARA WEARS THESE TO AVOID EYE CONTACT WITH PEOPLE, FREQUENTLY WORN WHILE LOOKING AFTER THE SHOP.



▶ ITEM 2:

[IRON EATING RAT]

LEGENDARY MYTHICAL BEAST SAID TO APPEAR BEFORE WELL-LEARNED SWORDSMITH'S. IT EATS RUST TO SURVIVE, SO CARE FOR TOOLS AND MATERIALS' NEEDED. THERE ARE MANY WHO WANT ONE DUE TO IT PALM-SIZED CUTENESS, BUT IT IS HARD TO OBTAIN DUE TO RARENESS OF SWORDSMITH'S.



▶ ITEM 3:

[LEATHER GLOVES OF THE FIRE RAT]

GLOVES CREATED WITH THE PELT OF RARE MONSTERS THAT SHOW UP AT NIGHT ON VOLCANOES, THE GLOVES WOULD BE FINE EVEN IF SWALLOWED BY A RED DRAGON DUE TO IT'S FLAME-RESISTANCE.



Name: Tatara

Level: 90

Race: Dwarf

Class: Samurai

HP: 13421

MP: 6710	Equipment
----------	-----------

Smoky Quartz Goggles

Semi-transparent black quartz fit in elaborate goggles that blocks out intense light. Although the item gives a bonus when creating clay items using the furnace, Tatara wears these to avoid eye contact with people, frequently worn while looking after the shop.

Iron Eating Rat

Legendary mythical beast said to appear before well-learned Swordsmiths. It eats rust to survive, so care for tools and materials needed. There are many who want one due to its palm sized cuteness, but it is hard to obtain due to rareness of Swordsmiths.

Leather Gloves of the Fire Rat

Gloves created with the pelt of rare monsters that show up at night on volcanoes. The gloves would be fine even if swallowed by a Red Dragon due to their flame-resistance.

Chapter 1: Murderer

Part 1

As usual, Akatsuki entered a pathway which was not very wide. In a deep corner of the production street, this zone was a remodeled basement full of wooden boxes.

This was the storefront of the production guild Amenoma, evident from the large amount of worn-out Japanese swords on display with the 'pick up' option disabled. Among the many weapon crafting guilds, it was a weird guild that specialized exclusively on Japanese swords.

The members who ran such a strange guild were not normal themselves. Because of their enthusiasm in crafting, the ingredients and tools were overflowing from the grand-scale forge inside. Even the storefront had crates of unfinished blades and ingredients, looking more like a warehouse.

But this was convenient for Akatsuki.

Being bombarded with greetings of 'welcome' pressured her and she would be put off by a sales clerk recommending her products. Akatsuki was shy by nature. Although she could converse freely with her guildmates Naotsugu and Nyanta, and was warming up to Tohya and Isuzu, she still found it hard to handle people other than them.

Akatsuki was thankful she could browse Amenoma's merchandise in peace (because of the laid-back nature of this guild).

"Hmmm..."

Akatsuki recalled the way around and walked to a corner of the store.

Japanese swords that could be used by many classes were displayed in this section.

Glass displays were uncommon in this world. The swords were simply hung on the wall.

This zone was owned by the guild Amenoma so the sale items had been set to be immovable by others. Akatsuki who was not a guild member was unable to take the items with her even though she could touch them. She could examine the items and see the stats on her status screen, so it was

not an inconvenience to shoppers. They did not need to worry about shoplifting either, a very convenient setting.

There were dozens of swords in this section.

Akatsuki had set her eyes on several of them.

In Elder Tales, the conditions for equipping an item could be seen through its status screen. For example, this 'green steel Kodachi-black wrought hilt' could be equipped by Guardians, Samurai, Assassins, Swashbucklers, Bards, and Kannagi; these 6 classes.

Samurai could basically equip all swords, but if the status screen of the sword did not include Samurai in its user list, they would not be able to equip that sword. On the other hand, a Monk could not equip most swords, but he could equip the ones that specifically stated that it could be equipped by Monks.

The main weapons in Akatsuki's Assassin class were bows, swords, blades, and whips. But they could equip a wide array of other weapons because they belonged to the weapon based class. Akatsuki used the Kodachi since Elder Tales was still a game because she thought it was cool, but she had grown to love it because of its practicality after the Catastrophe. With her experience in Kendo, this was the weapon she found easiest to use.

It was tough to choose a weapon. Akatsuki browsed through the list she was familiar with after repeated usage. There were probably tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands of weapons in Elder Tales. But it was common knowledge that the choices were much more limited for an Adventurer seeking an ideal weapon.

In terms of weapons, there were one handed swords, two handed swords, spears, axes, pole arms, bows, staves, clubs, gauntlets, throwing weapons, whips, and other special weapons. The number of each weapon type was different, but each type had about 10% of the hundred thousand weapons available.

Another issue was the levels needed to equip weapons. In Elder Tales, there would be higher-tier weapons available for every ten levels you gained. Every Adventurer needed to refresh their equipment after leveling 10 levels, since they would lose out to players of the same level if they did not upgrade their gear. Hardcore players would pay even more attention to

their equipment and review them frequently. With the level cap at 100, they would need to change their weapons 20 times if they upgraded every 5 levels.

Another thing to note was the 12 classes available to players. Take a Kodachi for instance, Assassins focusing on agility and attack power would consider different attributes compared to a Kannagi concentrating on magic power and elemental defense, and would choose different Kodachi. Similarly for Assassins, their preference between higher damage and higher attack speed would affect their weapon choice.

Applying these conditions would filter the choices further down from the 10% suitable by level rank. The choices would dwindle down to a manageable amount despite the overwhelming total number of available weapons.

For Akatsuki, there were about 10 choices.

Here lay another giant problem.

The possibility of obtaining them.

In Elder Tales, without exception, the most powerful weapons were the rewards from major raids. Akatsuki had no experience in major raids. She was confident of her level and gaming skills, but that was the limit of Adventurers that only went for party battles. Also, 90% of the raid weapons dropped had a 'no trade' attribute. That meant they could not gift or sell the items obtained from raids. Unless you took part in the raids and picked them up on-site, you would never be able to obtain them.

Although Akatsuki had 10 weapons on her wish list, only 2 could be traded without taking part in major raids.

"... Welcome."

Akatsuki turned and faced the source of the voice.

Standing there was a girl about Akatsuki's size. Dwarves as a race were about the height of a human child, so her actual height might be taller. They had several traits that were beneficial to production players, and were a popular race among the production guilds.

Her name was Tatara, guild master of Amenoma, a craftsman with great crafting skills. Akatsuki knew her and acknowledged the greeting with a nod. Although she knew Tatara, they were not acquainted at a level where they could chat casually yet.

"Erm..."

But Akatsuki was still grateful for Tatara's presence. Tatara had the reputation of pouring all her love into her swords, evident from her rare subclass of Bladesmith, a high grade Blacksmith. She was reserved socially, not talking to the customers visiting the storefront and was laid back about doing business. She was one of the few people Akatsuki was not afraid of.

Akatsuki asked her about something she was concerned with.

"Pardon me, may I ask what happened to the sword that was displayed here?"

Her voice was a bit stiff. Akatsuki got tense when asking questions to people that were not her guild mates. As Akatsuki thought about all this, Tatara slouched lazily on the counter and replied: "I sold it."

This was a stunning revelation to Akatsuki.

Akatsuki frequented Amenoma for the past 2 months.

The high-level equipment Akatsuki was after was horribly expensive since it was a rare tradable weapon drop from raids. Amenoma was selling it after modifying it, but from what Akatsuki knew, Kodachi were not in demand here. That's why it had remained unsold after 2 months, and Akatsuki assumed that even if she did not buy it, the store would not be able to sell it.

"Really?"

"Yeah, it's true. I remember... It was paid in cash."

"Woo..."

She was at a loss for words. This was totally unexpected.

Akatsuki looked to the wall again and confirmed the presence of 'Meito-Haganemushi' which she wanted the most, as well as the absence of 'Sentou-Byakumaru'.^[1] 'Sentou-Byakumaru' had an ability that could be

activated, invoking area frost damage. It was highly effective against opponents with high physical defense, but area damage was difficult to control in some situations. She should be glad her favorite weapon was still available.

"... Want to buy?"

"Woo woo woo..."

She could not vocalize her answer to this question.

(Of course I want to. I want it so bad.)

Assassins from the weapon-based class relied more heavily on their weapons' quality than other classes. In addition, Akatsuki had some personal agenda. She wanted better weapons.

But high-quality weapons were so expensive.

The weapon at the top of her wish list, 'Meito-Haganemushi', might get sold too if she left it alone. But the price tag was twice the amount of Akatsuki's entire fortune.

No matter how much she wanted it, she was unable to mouth the words 'I want to buy'.

Akatsuki had been battling monsters daily. She had kept this up since the Sand Leaf mopping-up campaign, after Shiroe got cooped up in the guild house. But after the Catastrophe, there was a limit to the means to secure money in this world by yourself.

Shiroe, no, maybe Maryele or one of the other guild masters of the Round Table Council might be able to come up with the money easily, but it was a heavy burden on Akatsuki. She forced herself to look away from the beautiful blade in the black sheath, shaking her head several times to express her intent.

It seemed like Tatara was not that interested in improving sales. Since Akatsuki was not buying, she continued to rest face down on the counter. The counter was just like her bed.

Akatsuki grabbed the hilt of the Kodachi she had equipped, to take her mind off things and left Amenoma.

For the young girl who wanted to improve her combat capability, there was still somewhere she needed to go.

Part 2

The streets of Akiba welcomed the scenery of December completely.

Yamato was cooler than Japan in the old world in the summer, which translated to a more brutal winter too. It had snowed several times in December. Although the snow did not pile up yet, the wind was becoming chillier by the day.

But Akiba was a city of Adventurers.

Although there was an increase in the number of People of the Land, two-thirds of the pedestrians on the streets were Adventurers. Adventurers had tough bodies and did not fear the cold, but they could equip an aquamarine ring that could regulate body temperature if it got too chilly for them.

Akatsuki rushed through the streets in the morning light.

Her destination was the suburbs. Akatsuki blew her summoning flute at the southern edge of Akiba, calling forth a black stallion to her and mounting it.

(I want to get stronger...)

Akatsuki said to herself in her heart.

This thought surfaced once every day... No, she thought about it dozens of times daily.

Akatsuki reached for the sheath on her waist with her fingertips.

This 'Changel-kin' sword was a top Production-class weapon that had been with her before the Catastrophe happened.^[2] It was not a weak Kodachi, one of the best weapons you could get through party-level adventures.

Akatsuki thought she was similar to this weapon.

She was in the top ranks in 6-men party battles, completing her assigned duties perfectly. But there were higher tiers in Elder Tales, and that was major raids. Akatsuki did not have any experience with these raids. She

avoided them because of the long waiting time and the complicated personal relations involved.

Another reason was that no one asked her.

But the fact remained that Akatsuki did not have experience with raids. This meant she could not get the Artifact or Phantasmal-class equipment available only through these raids. There were battle guilds like Black Sword Knights and D.D.D who were the top of their league in Akiba. There should be top-ranked Assassins who were better than Akatsuki and with equipment that would make her green with envy.

It was the same when she compared herself with Shiroe, Naotsugu, and Nyanta.

They were part of the legendary Debauchery Tea Party that had top-notch Adventurers who rivaled those of major battle guilds.

Compared to her comrades, her abilities paled in comparison.

Akatsuki was a competent Assassin, she might not be top-class, but she definitely was at the peak of the 2nd class. But she was not a top-class Assassin.

This was the reality Akatsuki was facing.

The best of the 2nd class.

She was the same as the weapon she was using.

She was thinking of advancing to the worse of the top class in equipment when she visited Amenoma, but the top-class weapons were too expensive for her. She felt ridiculous visiting the shop everyday.

Akatsuki dismounted near 'Birdland Duvacha'. She was not planning anything sinister, she just wanted to move in silence.

After traversing the overgrown forest for a while, her view was blocked by the greenery.

This was a well-traveled path in the forest, designed to meander about by the developers. This was a design technique to make a small area look bigger than it really was.

'Birdland Duvacha' was a type of field maze. Even though it was outdoors, the area was confined by the meandering paths and was set as a place to fight monsters.

But after the Catastrophe, you could bash through the maze in a straight line instead of sticking to the meandering path, although it might be troublesome and slower. It took some effort to climb up and down the cliff, but this was an easier route for the light and agile Akatsuki.

'Birdland Duvacha' was about 40 minutes away from Akiba by horse. A zone with level 80 monsters, Akatsuki who was level 91 would not be able to get EXP here, but it was a safe place for her to travel in. The monsters that appeared here could be beaten by her safely and would not fall in one hit, a suitable place for her to try out her weapons and skills. Akatsuki had visited this place for battle training many times before.

The group she was looking for was also training.

After bashing through the bushes for a while, she could hear the sounds of battles. The sound of iron clashing, the harsh sound of freezing air and the sharp noise of lightning. The Black Sword Knights were going through group training today.

Akatsuki looked for a depression in the ground and lay low. She could see the whole training ground through the vegetation from her position.

Two parties of Black Sword Knights were going through a fierce mock battle. Akatsuki used her Tracker subclass to hide her presence as she watched the Black Sword Knights train.

Rumors of 'Over level'^[3] started to spread around the time of the Libra Festival.

It started out as an urban legend and began to spread among the populace.

In Elder Tales, the special moves of Adventurers were expressed in the form of skills. Skills offered Adventurers the ability to perform many feats under certain conditions, but they were normally restricted to what their class was capable of. An example would be the skill Assassinate used by Akatsuki which Assassins could learn after reaching a certain level. As the Adventurer's level rose, they would have access to higher forms of the

same technique. For instance, Assassinate III which awakened at level 47 was weaker than Assassinate IV which was learned at level 57.

But the same Assassinate IV would have different power depending on who used it. And that was dependent on the skill level. The skill you learned after gaining the requisite level was known as the 'Comprehension level'. You could use the skill but it lacked in power. By using specific items or investing 'mastery points', you could improve the skill to 'Novice', 'Intermediate', 'Hidden', or 'Secret level'.^[4] Intermediate level required the use of an 'intermediate scroll' which was crafted by a high-level Adventurer of the same class. Hidden level needed a 'hidden scroll' that was made from rare item drops, which could be purchased for a high price.

But it was different for the 'Secret level', which required completing a raid level quest to obtain the 'secret scroll'. This was the reason behind the gap of the top-class Adventurers in major guilds and 2nd class Adventurers like Akatsuki. These skills were hard to master.

As for 'Over level', it was rumored to be a tier higher than Secret level.

This was a level that did not exist before the Catastrophe, when Elder Tales was still a game.

As the skill level increased, its power could be seen in many areas.

Although the skills differed slightly, Assassinate was an attack skill, so it purely increased attack power. From what Akatsuki remembered, the attack power increased by 22% if she progressed her 'Comprehension' to 'Secret level'. There was no telling how much the power would improve if she reached 'Over level'.

Although she had heard nothing but good things about the 'Over level', its existence remained just a rumor because the Adventurers who could confirm and say for sure were few in number. About half the people in Akiba did not believe that 'Over level' existed. The other half remained skeptical of its power. Akatsuki only believed it existed because Shiroe said so.

(If I can get my hands on 'Over level', I will be stronger...)

Akatsuki thought this as she hugged herself.

Most of Akatsuki's skills were at the 'Intermediate' or 'Hidden level'. It was more than enough for party-level Adventurers, but it was weak compared to the members of major guilds. This was the obstacle Akatsuki was facing.

But 'Over level' definitely existed.

Since Shiroe said so, it must be true.

Out of all the Adventurers in Akiba, the members of the Black Sword Knights would be the ones most likely to reach this skill level. Honesty and D.D.D probably had members with 'Over level', but the elitist Black Sword Knights had a higher chance of finding such people.

Although she was not sure how to master 'Over level', but considering the fact that the 'Secret level' was learned through special raid-level quests, it should be the same for 'Over level'. That was what the word on the street said. The way to learn 'Over level' was basically unknown. Without the support of online guides, the spread of knowledge in Elder Tales had ground to a stop, and the value of knowledge was remarkably high.

That was why Akatsuki was enduring the chilling cold of December, curling up under the trees to observe the Black Sword Knights' training. If another Assassin used 'Over level', she could confirm its power with her own eyes. If it could be learned by going through a quest, she wanted to know how to go about it.

(Powerful... The fight was won in an instant.)

By observing them from the sidelines, she could tell that the Black Sword Knights were strong. Aside from the Assassins, the other classes of Adventurers were also at a remarkable level.

'—Hey, put your back into defending.'

'—Use more strength, this amount of damage won't do!'

'—Your legs are not steady enough!'

The members of Black Sword Knights who used these rough words freely were an elite group that only took in the top 1% of players on the Yamato server.

Their movements, coordination and equipment were aesthetic and powerful.

Just looking at them moved Akatsuki to the verge of tears.

Although she could not do anything other than fight.

But she was weaker than others in battling.

Akatsuki recalled that night of the festival and the profiles of her lord and junior illuminated by the bonfire. They were a pair of birds flying high, beyond Akatsuki's reach.

She wished to be by Shiroe's side. Very strongly.

But Akatsuki was unable to grasp Shiroe's point of view. So now she had to pay the price.

(I want to become stronger...)

Akatsuki said to herself in her heart again.

But repeating this would not make her stronger, and Akatsuki understood this. She also knew how foolish she was, observing the Black Sword Knights this way. She did not have the strength to accomplish anything.

The Akatsuki who was protecting Shiroe's secrets was lonelier than anyone in the winter of Akiba.

Part 3

The glass bottle was so huge that describing it as a bathtub made from glass was more adequate. A peach-colored fluid swirled around the glass container. A man on a stepladder threw some pale brown leaves in casually.

Although the fragrance that arose with the steam smelled similar to cocoa, the frowning Roderick knew it would not have any taste.

This was a research lab that was known as 'Roderick's Workshop'.

Just one of the rooms inside The Roderick Firm's guild tower.

A guild tower was another way of saying a guild hall. For The Roderick Firm that bought entire buildings to use as their base, it was an appropriate name for this place. Especially for a skyscraper like this.

One of the major production guilds of Akiba, The Roderick Firm, purchased seven buildings in the northern region of Akiba to serve as their guild base. One of them was Roderick's personal research laboratory, which was filled with research apparatus made from glass.

Although there were smaller pieces of equipment, most apparatus were similar to the container he was using, as big as a bathtub.

To craft items in Elder Tales, you just used the game menu selection and it would be made in 10 seconds. This method remained viable in this alternate world. But to achieve the new possibility Roderick was after, it was necessary to forego the game menu and start from scratch.

They would need bigger machines for mass production.

When the Round Table Council was formed, Shiroe showed them the possibility of creating brand-new items.

The first to bloom was the food industry, followed by the furniture-making realm and the developing world of fashion. There were new inventions announced by the craftsmen of Akiba everyday as technology advanced rapidly.

But there was some technical knowledge that existed in the old world which could not be replicated by the craftsmen here. Roderick was one of them. He was a Pharmacist, a production subclass that could create balms and potions that were common in fantasy games.

Since 'Recover HP by 180' potions did not exist in the old world, he could not use the old world as a reference to brew such a concoction. The Alchemist, Sigilmaker, Jeweller and other fantasy production classes faced similar issues.

But that did not mean they could not craft new items.

If the ingredients and techniques of the old world were not applicable here, they would have to examine and experiment with the ingredients existing in this world. Recovery and strengthening potions up to level 50 had been developed in the half-year that had passed, and there had also been significant improvements in Sigils and jewelry-making.

For Roderick, the mass production of 'minor appearance reset potions' was a major breakthrough. Unlike the real 'appearance reset potions', it was a

weak version that could only reset 2 out of the dozen settings like gender, height, weight, body shape, hair color, eye color, and skin color. But thanks to the prevalence of the potion, Adventurers who were distressed because their gender differed from the old world could now rest easy.

Following this, Roderick analyzed high quality potions like 'Ambrosia', 'Theriaca' and 'Yomotsumike', mass producing them and reverse-engineering alternatives through research. ^[5]

The Roderick Firm was one of the 3 major production guilds, but the direction it was taking and its goal differed from other crafting organizations.

When Elder Tales was just a game, items were crafted by choosing the ingredients using the game menu. The items that could be crafted varied from subclass to subclass and there was a need for many ingredients. Before going into production, the craftsmen needed to gather numerous 'recipe scrolls'.

Take Pharmacists for instance, they could create instant HP recovery potion, HP increase potion, HP recovery over time potion, all kinds of ability enhancing agents, 3 types of antidotes, preventive anti-toxins, dozens of poisons (to be applied on weapons), speed increase potion, attack speed increase potion... etc. There were new stronger potions available to the subclass with every 10 level increase so Roderick was able to mix over 600 types of potions back in the game days. That was the number of recipes he had.

But it was hard to gather all available recipe scrolls, even more so for beginners or normal Adventurers. To reach the stage where you could make any type of potion at required a huge investment of time and in-game wealth.

The Roderick Firm was started with the goal of completing the library of recipe scrolls. The recipe scrolls could be duplicated using rare ingredients. The craftsmen working in a guild gathering recipe scrolls would be able to learn from the recipe scrolls they had on hand, which was a big advantage over other craftsmen.

It was only natural for The Roderick Firm to shift their focus to research and development after the Catastrophe.

So far, all those interested in research and development as well as high-quality craftsmen were all gathered in The Roderick Firm.

Adventurers who applied techniques from the old world, trending towards mechanization and mass production would join Oceanic Systems. Those who liked doing business and working with the People of the Land congregated at the 8th District Shopping Center. Oceanic Systems had their own sales department, but The Roderick Firm outsourced their retail to 8th District Shopping Center and other merchant guilds. His members were all academics spending their spare time thinking about new experiments.

The Roderick Firm guild towers gradually became a mess, stuffed with complicated experimental apparatus and scrolls tabulating their experimental results. MMO games were popular among high school and college students. Since they were still in school, they were comfortable in this guild that was like a research facility.

Most of the members referred to themselves as part of Roderick Research Laboratory, or Rod Lab for short. For them, this was a place where they could have fun doing research, just like a school with lax discipline.

With activities like the popularity poll for the girls of 'attachment rice ball house', compared to a homely guild like Crescent Moon Alliance, they were growing accustomed to this world in a different way.

In this gigantic room with high ceilings located in the center of the guild hall, Roderick turned his head.

A young guild member was calling for him. The young boy went off after leaving a guest behind. Roderick stepped down from the stepladder and greeted his guest.

"Good day Nyanta-san."

"It's evening already nya."

Roderick thought for a moment. (It should still be morning...)

"The night will still come even if you skip lunch nya."

Nyanta answered the question in Roderick's heart. Nyanta looked at the surroundings with interest as he brushed his whiskers, and then nimbly took out a letter from his pouch for Roderick.

After reading the letter, Roderick felt troubled.

This was a letter from Shiroe of Log Horizon. This part was obvious. The contents were a request about investigation and development of the world, which was within his expectations. Their exchange of letters had been increasing recently.

There are countless flora and fauna in this alternate world as well as ores and minerals. Formulating new concoctions and checking their effects in order to craft new items was incredibly fun. From the materials needed to craft items from game menus in Elder Tales, they had a rough idea of the efficacy of each ingredient. By organizing such knowledge, they were able to develop new exciting products.

The Roderick Firm was a place where research fanatics gathered. Although they worked on different aspects, the guild members were all dedicated to their fields in the same way.

It was the same for Roderick too. But immersing himself in the joy of research meant leaving his Round Table Council duties to the other guild masters and troubling Shiroe the most. So he found it hard to reject Shiroe's request.

And Shiroe's letters normally brought benefits to The Roderick Firm. Roderick would commercialize Shiroe's observations and meet with promising guilds and Adventurers as per Shiroe's request. He had never lost out while working on Shiroe's requests.

But the letter this time was not as clear as his previous correspondences.

It had just a few lines.

"That seems to be the case nya."

"Do you know about the contents of this letter Nyanta-san?"

"Not at all."

Nyanta shrugged his hands at the stunned Roderick. Nyanta apparently had no idea.

'... I would like a catalog of magical items owned by the major guilds, and to investigate their effects. Especially the items with flavor text, would it be convenient?'

"Wait, anyway... I won't decline this request. But to investigate this, I will need Phantasmal and Secret level items, it is going to be expensive. Is that why he is asking me for help?"

"There are no such treasures in Log Horizon nya."

"There should be quite a few at your place right?"

"Nya haha. A lot of our family is in their growing phase, so we need money everywhere nya."

The calm laughter of Nyanta displayed the steady side of an adult. He could only be described as a gentleman with his usual neat and stylish demeanor.

Roderick sighed to signal his acceptance.

Since Shiroe said so, this experiment would benefit them sooner or later. Although this research required a big budget, it was still a manageable amount.

The task of investigating these items was definitely most suitable for The Roderick Firm to take up. Most of the recipes in Yamato could be found here, and there were fanatics who were more interested in research than food here.

"There are several issues I want to consult you about. Join me for lunch?"

"I already told you it's evening nya."

"Then let's have some ramen."

"If you insist nya."

Roderick and his long-time friend left the research lab he had stayed in for several hours. This friend of his shrugged.

Winter had come. A meal with hot soup would definitely be delicious.

Part 4

It was a freezing night.

The metallic breeze that was colder than yesterday blew through the city. Kyouko sneezed loudly and looked around her. That was a big one, how unfeminine.

Soujirou would be disillusioned with her if he saw this. She continued to rub her itching nose as she thought about this.

For Adventurers above a certain level, the cool breeze in the winter was nothing to worry about. But they would be lying to say it was not cold. With visual and audio information telling them 'this cold is unbearable', the cold attacked their psyche more than their body.

That's why Kyouko was quickening her pace and was returning to her guild house.

Probably half the members were already sleeping in the guild house.

The negotiation with the 8th District Shopping Center... or rather, the idle chat with them made her return this late. But the result was the large amount of goodies in Kyouko's Bag of Holding. She even managed to get 3 salted salmons. With this, some of her friends would definitely shed tears of happiness, this was the taste of their hometown after all.

(If this goes well maybe Soujirou-sama will...)

Kyouko smiled as she fantasized about Soujirou.

(Lunch with just the 2 of us, the menu is rice ball of course, with salmon inside. 'Soujirou-sama, there's rice on your face okay?' 'Eh? Where?' 'It's on the right.' 'Eh? Where?' 'You are such a messy eater... Let me get that for you'.) Then she would eat it. Fufu, something like that.

Kyouko blushed in the dark alley.

In the chilly winter breeze, the 12-chamber engine of the young girl was running at full power.

The athletic Kyouko raised her temperature easily. This was a body with a good metabolism rate. If it were Fragrant Olive, she would have collapsed from a nose bleed by now. Kyouko could not hold a candle to the anemic elf's delusions.

"Ahchoo!"

She let down her guard imagining about this lunch scene. A young maiden sneezing so loudly, that was careless of her.

In middle school and high school, she was teased a lot for her sneezing. 'Why are you acting like an old man Kyouko!' She could remember that even now, the lines of her schoolmate from the wind instrument club. And she really liked that boy too. How dare he compare a maiden to an old man. That really hurt.

With her one-track mind focusing on the sports club, she was a girl who laughed out loudly in class and was not really a maiden. But he should have picked something else to comment about instead. Such as 'I caught a glimpse of your great talent from your grand sneeze'. No, wait, that would be even more infuriating.

Kyouko thought about such things as she rushed towards the guild house.

She just noticed that sneezing in this world was the same as the old world. Although this was within expectations, it still seemed remarkable when she considered it in depth.

(Just coming to an alternate world is already unbelievable.)

She retorted to herself.

She was not in top condition because of all that sneezing.

Something green and icy stirred in the cold air.

The night breeze going through the gaps between the abandoned buildings made the trees sway. When she finally noticed, a man was standing in the darkness ahead of Kyouko.

About 1.75m in height, a man with long hair. Wearing a sleeveless black tank top and leather pants. His limbs were equipped with jet black armor giving him a strange silhouette, but this level of strangeness was common among the Adventurers of Akiba.

What made Kyouko stop in her tracks was the silent intimidation she felt from him.

A chill going down her spine made Kyouko stop and take a step back unconsciously.

Displeased with the distance created, the man walked towards her.

The pale illumination of the Bugs Lights set up by the Round Table Council gradually shone on the man stepping out of the darkness. He was wearing a black mask the size of a blindfold and holding a green blade that seemed to be sucking in light from the surroundings.

Facing the blade that seemed to be lifted by strings, Kyouko's body reacted faster than her mind.

Kyouko was an experienced level 90 Guardian. Although she was known as one of the harem girls of West Wind Brigade, it was still a top 5 battle guild in Akiba.

As captain of the 2nd battle party, Kyouko was a veteran in a fight.

But that was all thanks to Kyouko's body of an Adventurer.

The flash of silver seemed to slash through just millimeters away from her eye, making her break out in cold sweat. The first thing she grasped was the killing intent that was coming after her. The man in front of her was trying to kill Kyouko. The next thing to come up in her mind was the term 'PK' which was immediately dismissed by the term 'city zone'.

(No, it is impossible to kill someone in the city zone.)

(The guards will teleport over and stop you if you try.)

So she just needed to hang on until the guards made their way here.

The worst thing that could happen was dying. But even if she died, she would just respawn in the cathedral. This was the privilege of the Adventurers. There was nothing to be afraid of. And there were no beings in existence that could send her, a level 90 player, to the cathedral so easily. Guardians had the highest defense among the 12 classes. Although she was not wearing armor while walking the streets, the physical defense of her body was still effective. No problem, she could handle this. There was no need to panic.

Kyouko tried to calm herself.

But she failed.

The man charged in so close that their lips were almost touching, smiling with his mouth wide open, letting her look deep down into his throat. This ground the calmness Kyouko collected into dust.

Too fast. Even her level 90 dynamic vision could not keep up. No, this was not speed, but a skill. If she watched closely, he was squirming like a formless being, like a needle that was sewing the gaps between your thoughts up, closing the distance instantaneously.

What she saw was just the first few seconds of the strike of his sword.

Kyouko looked at the man holding the hilt of the sword extending out from her belly.

Wrong.

The man had pierced her with his sword.

Instead of screaming, it was akin to vomiting all the air in her lungs out. Kyouko leapt.



But the man was twisting the sword piercing her thigh with a grin when Kyouko landed.

Because of a bad status effect, Kyouko was bleeding profusely from her wounds. Kyouko was struggling in the back-alley like a wounded hare. She could not even scream properly, her limbs numbed like a fever patient.

But even so, Kyouko fended off several attacks agilely thanks to her powerful Adventurer body.

Kyoto continued to shriek unsuccessfully, trying to regain her composure, struggling to figure out how to escape from this predicament.

It seemed to have been a long time.

Much too long.

Shaken by fear of the man who liked to stab as he pleased, Kyouko lost track of time. But it seemed to be too long.

"Ah, ah. Ahhh."

As he pierced Kyouko's breast, the man's blood red maw twisted into a smile as he looked at Kyouko.

"The guards aren't coming."

After comprehending these words, Kyouko's mind was full of questions buzzing like background noise. This was against the rules, such things never happened before. Kyouko swung her fist at the man in response to this unreasonable announcement.

A blade sprouted out from her fist.

This was a rather farcical scene. The man leapt back and stopped Kyouko's fist with his piercing strike. This was a speed and technique that surpassed the level 90 Kyouko. Soujirou's Over level Clairvoyance might be able to keep up, but she could not see through this attack.

Kyouko continued to resist with punches and kicks.

Although Kyouko had no martial arts training, the body of Adventurers had the ability to toy with a bear in battle. Her attacks were absorbed and devoured by the sword. The single blade in the man's right arm seem to split into thousands of copies to protect the man and cut up Kyouko.

She did not get it.

Why didn't the guards teleport here? Why was PK allowed in the city? Why was there a monster infiltrating Akiba? Kyouko didn't get it.

Kyouko could not even think logically as she fought on, driven by a feverish heat. If Kyouko seemed feverish, the man could only be described as insane. The man with a slimy smile seemed to be torturing or playing around, piercing Kyouko's body everywhere.

The late night battle ended in silence.

The breeze blowing between the buildings blew away the sound of the battle.

Kyouko fell with her head full of questions. The man's sharp blade pierced through her neck like he planned all along. As the color faded from her vision, Kyouko could see her blood staining the blade crystallize in the cold and disperse into the air.

Although it was the middle of winter, the frozen blood looked just like the petals of a Sakura flower.

Frostbite was settling in the wounds on her limbs. Her messed-up paralyzed limbs made her cry tears that did not originate from sorrow.

Kyouko was sent to the cathedral in accordance with the law of this world. When the young girl opened her eyes and reached the guild house where her comrades were waiting, it was already morning.

And so, the rumors of the Murderer spread on the streets of Akiba along with the intimidating winter chill.

Part 5

A murderer was haunting the streets of Akiba at night.

The news spread faster than the wind throughout the city. There were 3 victims on the very first night, 1 casualty on the 2nd night. A party of 5 fell to the Murderer on the 3rd night.

Since veterans of battle guilds also fell to him, this proved the combat ability of the Murderer was beyond that of a level 90 Adventurer.

It was believed initially the incident could be solved easily.

Firstly, in this world of Elder Tales, numbers were equivalent to strength. Even if the Murderer was stronger than let's say 3 people, the party system could be used to form a group of 6 to take him out if there was a need.

There was another unique feature of this world. Although all the victims died by the hands of the Murderer, they were still 'alive'. When Adventurers died, they would respawn in the cathedral. So witness testimony and intelligence on the Murderer were plentiful.

Enbart Nelles.

No guild.

Level 94, Samurai.

A head of dark blue long hair, a mask covering both his eyes. Metallic armor that covered his limbs.

With these characteristics in hand, the investigation should be a piece of cake. The incidents happened late at night, but they could search for him in the day too. West Wind Brigade and Honesty who suffered casualties were leading the search for the culprit.

But after looking for a week, they didn't find the Murderer while the body count continued to rise.

Adventurers killing Adventurers was known as PK (Player Kill). This was one way to play the game, but was restricted to certain zones surrounding Akiba, enforced by the Round Table Council. Adventurers who persisted in PK activities were known as PKers (Player Killers), but would not be known as 'Murderers'.

To begin with, the city zone of Akiba was protected by guards.

If any violent incidents occurred, a magic alarm would sound at the guardroom. The People of the Land wearing special armor, the guards, would then move on scene to apprehend the culprits. You could tell there was something strange happening from this point alone.

The Round Table Council had already interviewed the guards at the guardroom during their investigation. The result indicated that the guards

did not detect anything wrong when the incidents occurred. In terms of the Elder Tales game system, it had judged that no PK occurred.

News of the Murderer spread like wildfire in Akiba.

But that was not out of fear of the case.

It was closer to being a ghost story or a paranormal occurrence.

Death was not a risky matter to Adventurers.

There would be some form of penalty, which was the danger of losing your memories of the old world. This fact had been gradually made known to the public by the Round Table Council carefully. Even so, a large part of the populace were very concerned with the risk of memory loss. This was reflected in an increase in the number of Adventurers focusing on crafting in the city.

But most of the citizens were relaxed about this news.

That was because Adventurers who had died dozens of times commented 'The memory loss is not a problem at all'. And they continued to function normally in the city, living on as usual with their friends.

In any case, the fact that Adventurers needed to live on in this world was inevitable.

Even if they fell to the Murderer, they would not lose too much.

Another thing was the high confidence level they had in the Round Table Council, although few would actually say it out loud.

The governing body of Akiba, the Round Table Council that was formed less than a month after the Catastrophe had achieved both tangible and intangible results. The Adventurers might come from different backgrounds in the old world, but they shared a common experience in this new one. That was the shock brought by the Catastrophe and the devastation that followed. Their representatives who answered the call of duty and were capable of running an event as big as the Libra Festival were the pride of the Akiba citizens.

Just the term 'Murderer' showed how strange this case was.

The unfathomable occurrence that was beyond the game setting, the demon that struck like a catastrophe... did not cause too much damage. It struck fear into the hearts of people, but was just treated like a paranormal incident. Even though he was roaming free out there, he would be caught eventually, that's what the citizens thought.

Ever since the Catastrophe, there had been many strange incidents, with new reports every day. Akiba, the biggest Adventurer city on the Yamato server, gathered all the news in the region. Mysterious things, mildly interesting events, terrifying incidents, worrisome happenings, all sort of news congregated here.

Certainly the Murderer was not a trifling matter.

But there were more pressing issues facing Akiba right now.

The biggest news right now were the "raid on Seven Falls" and the "rise of the giant guild in Minami."

The Akiba expedition force that was victorious in the battle of Sand Leaf was finally starting their invasion of the Seven Fall Citadel. The Goblin King who was crowned in the 'Return of the Goblin King' quest would adjust his strength according to the activity of the Adventurers. After being ignored by the Adventurers following the chaos of the Catastrophe, the Goblin King had become the strongest raid boss ever in the history of this quest. He even sent an army in an attempt to conquer Sand Leaf.

No matter how difficult the quest got, they were just goblins. They were not a threat according to the game settings.

But there was still the possibility the knowledge of the game might not translate perfectly to this world after the Catastrophe. Even if the Adventurers didn't see the goblins as a threat, the goblins could be deadly to the People of the Land.

That was the reason why the Round Table Council was sending an elite army to subdue the Goblin King.

A 450 men army led by commander-in-chief Krusty.

The decision to send the army was to raid the goblins as well as bring peace to the northeast region of the land. At the same time, this expedition

was also a part of the negotiations with the League of Freedom Towns Eastal.

With Krusty and Issac the heroes of Akiba taking the field, along with Charasin and Akaneya supporting from the back.

The burden on the other members of the Round Table Council also increased substantially. They were rumored to be spending their days in the guild buildings or their guild halls, buried in work.

News of the attack on the Seven Fall Citadel was one of the headlines grabbing the attention of the citizens.

The 450 men army had already set off, and the people believed they would return victorious. But the supply lines and back-end support were also crucial, so they must be ready to provide them with aid. This was something they needed to be prepared for, and could not be ignored.

The other big news was the rise of Plant hwyaden which was dominating the west.

Most Adventurers bore complicated feelings about the city of Minami.

For the players in Yamato who hailed from Japan, the governing body in Minami was similar to a form of dictatorship.

For a game like Elder Tales, it was only natural for countless guilds to coexist. The chaos in Akiba evolving into conflicts between guilds was a natural progression.

To unite all the guilds in such a short window of time felt a bit forceful.

But it was hard to point out what was wrong with this system. It was too early to say something was wrong just because it was a dictatorship. From the news coming from the Minami, scuffles between Adventurers were dropping. They were going about it a different way than Akiba, but it seemed the Adventurers were living together in peace and harmony.

For Adventurers playing on the same Yamato server, it was not surprising to have old friends or comrades living apart in either Akiba or Minami. Stories of Adventurers in Minami inviting friends in Akiba to move over, or players in Akiba asking comrades in Minami to relocate here were common.

In the end, it was hard for the Japanese to talk about politics in their daily lives.

With the difference in Akiba and Minami you could understand the news with just a general knowledge and a bit of background. But it was awkward to bring it up as a conversational topic, an issue all Adventurers were aware about.

Speaking of the difference in population size, Akiba had more citizens. But the Adventurers in Plant hwyaden were twice that of Akiba's biggest guild, Oceanic Systems.

The people knew this situation would make waves in the future, but were reluctant to talk about it, creating an awkward atmosphere.

Between these 2 major pieces of news, Akiba passed each day full of tension steadily. That's why the citizens didn't think much about the Murderer although they were aware of him.

The Murderer did not appear on the 4th and 5th day.

But Honesty's patrol team was wiped out on the 6th day.

The Round Table Council raised the alert level steadily. Although no curfew was set, the citizens were reminded to avoid going out at night. It was not too bad if the victims were Adventurers, but it would be really bad if any People of the Land were to fall. The casualties so far had all been Adventurers, but that didn't guarantee the safety of the People of the Land.

At this point in time, no Adventurer understood what the appearance of the Murderer meant on the grand scale of things.

CHAPTER.

2

CRACKED WING

[ひび割れた翼]



▶ NAME: NAZUNA

▶ LEVEL: 90

▶ RACE: FOXTAIL

▶ CLASS: KANNAGI

▶ HP: 10771

▶ MP: 10637

▶ ITEM 1:

[RIGGED DICE]

DICE-SHAPED ORNAMENTS. POSSESSES A MAGICAL ABILITY TO BESTOW GUARANTEED CRITICAL HITS, BUT ITS AFTER-CAST DELAY IS VERY LONG AND BE USED AT MOST ONLY ONCE PER DAY. IT IS POSSIBLE TO USE THESE AS NORMAL DICE, BUT NAZUNA HAS SEALED THEM AWAY SINCE SHE HAS NEVER GOTTEN A GOOD NUMBER FROM THEM.



▶ ITEM 2:

[AVIDYA'S STRIKING FIGURE]

KATANA ONLY FOR USE BY THE KANNAGI. STRENGTHENS BARRIERS AND RAISES CASTING SPEED, AN EXCELLENT ITEM THAT CAN EVEN CAUSE CRITICALS WHEN USING RECOVERY SPELLS. DUE TO ITS STURDINESS, IT CAN BE USED AS WEAPON AND NAZUNA OFTEN FIGHTS IN THE FRONTLINE WITH IT. WON FROM A GAMBLE WITH A CERTAIN SWORDSMITH.



▶ ITEM 3:

[MITHRIL KATABIRA]

PRODUCTION-CLASS GARMENT WOVEN OUT OF MITHRIL THREADS. IT IS DELICATE AND NOT PAINFUL IF WORN ON BARE SKIN, AND CAN BE WORE TOGETHER WITH ARMOR. NAZUNA USUALLY WEARS THIS UNDER HER CLOTHES BUT SHE TENDS TO WANDER AROUND WEARING ONLY THIS WHENEVER SHE'S DRUNK. ON SUCH OCCASIONS THE OTHERS WOULD CATCH AND THROW HER BACK INTO HER BEDROOM BEFORE SOUJIROU SEES HER.



Name: Nazuna

Level: 90

Race: Foxtail

Class: Kannagi

HP: 10771

MP: 10637

Equipment

Rigged Dice

Dice-shaped ornaments. Possesses a magical ability to bestow guaranteed critical hits, but its after-cast delay is very long and it can be used at most only once per day. It is possible to use these as normal dice, but Nazuna has sealed them away since she has never gotten a good number from them.

Mumyou's Uchisugata

Katana only for use by the Kannagi. Strengthens barriers and raises casting speed, an excellent item that can even cause criticals when using recovery spells. Due to its sturdiness, it can be used as a weapon and Nazuna often fights in the frontline with it. Won from a gamble with a certain Swordsmith.

Mithril Katabira

Production-class garment woven out of Mithril threads. It is delicate and not painful if worn on bare skin, and can be wore together with armor. Nazuna usually wears this under her clothes but she tends to wander around wearing ONLY this whenever she's drunk. On such occasions the others would catch and throw her back into her bedroom before Soujirou sees her.

Chapter 2: Cracked Wing

Part 1

"Just give in, okay? Fufu, you just need to entrust your body to me. I won't do anything bad to you, alright?"

"Mary...you are acting like a perverted old man."

"Ah, ah wahh!"

Akatsuki was sitting at the edge of the couch, glancing at the chaos in the room.

This was a beautiful meeting room. The peach-colored wallpaper was brand-new and the decor was filled with grace and feminine elegance. The coffee table along with the luxurious tea set and the ladies in the room created a gorgeous atmosphere.

The host, Raynesia, maintained her usual smile with a hint of uneasiness. That was natural. The clothes Maryele wanted her to wear was a nurse uniform.

Even Akatsuki thought it was too adventurous.

"This dress is... a bit small for me."

Raynesia shook her head like a trembling rabbit. (Wrong move...) Akatsuki thought. Maryele replied, "Don't worry! Our seamstress tailored it perfectly for you!" as she moved in to capture Raynesia.

This roundabout way of declining Maryele would not work. If it was Henrietta...that would be even worse. Akatsuki shook her head even thinking about it.

"Eh, like this? This way?"

"Not this way. Yahh!"

"Mary... I told you not to use this action."

"Ah wah wah!"

Serara stood beside them at a loss. She obediently followed Maryele's instruction of, 'bring me that hairband over there,' even while being

flustered, making the hierarchical relationship in Crescent Moon Alliance clear.

"Aren't you going to rescue her?"

The female Adventurer sitting opposite Akatsuki holding an elegant tea set was Rieze. She was a Sorcerer in D.D.D with a head of blonde hair. Akatsuki heard that this beautiful lady with a slender body was the captain of the training corps.

Akatsuki shook her head in response to Rieze's query.

She had some experience with this situation. Akatsuki was in Raynesia's position not too long ago, suffering these antics frequently. Although most of the attacks came from Henrietta, it was not much different from the current situation.

The number of victims would double if she moved in now. Akatsuki needed to protect herself.

The point was this room had been transformed into the dress-up room of Crescent Moon Alliance demons.

"Is that so." Rieze dropped her gaze to her red tea without any hint of accusation.

Akatsuki picked up the red bean bun on the plate and took a small bite. It was sweet and savory, one of the perks of this mission.

But Akatsuki thought calling this chaotic tea party a mission sounded weird.

She was here on Shiroe's request after all. It might be just a small errand, but Akatsuki thought of it as her bond with Shiroe. Akatsuki would continue to take part in these tea parties for the following month.

It was just Akatsuki in the beginning.

She drank her tea in awkward silence under the suspicious gaze of Raynesia and left after 15 minutes. About a week later, Maryele joined in. She came alone sometimes, other times she would bring some friends from Crescent Moon Alliance along. Following that, Rieze, who was drinking tea in front of her, and ladies from several other guilds also started to frequent this tea party.

To be honest, Akatsuki was not motivated to do this.

She was familiar with the girls of Crescent Moon Alliance like Maryele, Henrietta, and Serara, but it was hard to sit with the members of other guilds. Akatsuki thought that they must be disappointed at her for being unable to hold a conversation.

Surprisingly, apart from the members of Crescent Moon Alliance, the only one Akatsuki could speak comfortably with was Raynesia.

There were about fifteen female Adventurers who had shown up to this tea party. Although Maryele attended frequently, it was only two or three times a week. Each participant had their own responsibilities in their respective guilds.

The most consistent participant who visited daily was Akatsuki, although she was only doing it to keep her promise with Shiroe.

"Woah. Your skin is beautiful, as expected of the princess."

"A, Akatsuki-san. Erm... help me..."

"Ah wah wah..."

"Non non. I will be gentle!"

However, seeing each other frequently didn't mean that they were now friends. They had only progressed to the stage where they could chat idly.

It was troubling when Raynesia hinted to Akatsuki that she should save her. Mainly, because Akatsuki was also prey in this game. Akatsuki shrank her body thinking that she would be able to survive this ordeal if she could make herself smaller, but her interesting actions caught the attention of Henrietta.

"Akatsuki-chan♪ Why are you curling up like a ball?"

"!"

Akatsuki jumped, startled, and began denying in a panic, making Henrietta smile. But she did not press on further today. She was probably satisfied just by teasing Akatsuki.

The exhausted Raynesia walked to Akatsuki's side to seek refuge. Even after being toyed with for so long, she was still sitting elegantly with her

knees closed. She was wearing her usual expression, but her eyes were dead tired.

Akatsuki poured tea into Raynesia's cup.

She knew how exhausted Raynesia must be.

The mastermind, Maryele, took new costumes from her Bag of Holding and lined them up with the help of Serara.

The scariest thing was the swimming costume that was part of the lineup. Maryele didn't even care that it was the middle of winter now. Akatsuki felt sorry for Raynesia.

Raynesia was a very beautiful girl. She had a delicate neck, a slender frame which supported her elegant shoulder contours, a small face and long, luscious silver hair that shone like silk. She had a gentle nature, was always smiling and never spoke loudly. A real high-society lady.

(Ah, but she is a princess, that is different from a being a lady, right?)

Akatsuki considered the role of 'princess' to be something like a higher job level than 'lady'. Thinking like this really made Raynesia appear to be of a higher grade.

The first meeting between Raynesia and Akatsuki was rather tense.

On the day they decided to march for Sand Leaf, Akatsuki helped Raynesia to change her clothes under Shiroe's instructions... or more accurately, stripping off her dress and forcing her to put on another set of clothes.

(Raynesia must think of me as a barbaric person), Akatsuki thought. Raynesia was still wary of her ever since the daily tea parties had started, and was jumpy even now.

However, Raynesia didn't avoid Akatsuki blatantly or ignore her words.

Raynesia put careful thought to every sentence and conversed as warmly as she could. That the princess had such a good upbringing impressed Akatsuki deeply. Her memory was good and she could comprehend topics after talking about them just once. Akatsuki understood why Raynesia was so popular.

"My Adventurer guests, is this your usual clothing?" Raynesia said in a perplexed voice.

She was talking about the nurse uniform she was wearing...one with a mini skirt on top of that. Although Raynesia was not very tall, her proportions were perfect and her breasts formed a beautiful curve, so the outfit suited her well. Akatsuki shook her head feeling complicated emotions. No matter how you sliced it, there was only a very small minority of Adventurers who dressed like this daily. (There were still players who did so, thanks to the cultural influence of Elder Tales.)

Raynesia got more depressed after confirming the negative answer.

Every action of hers was like a beauty in a drawing, making Akatsuki feel even more complicated.

(If I act more like she does, my lord surely would... No, he would not.)

Akatsuki thought.

Raynesia did not have the body of an Adventurer or the ability of an Assassin. There was no way for her to be Shiroe's bodyguard. Akatsuki was unwilling to give that up. She knew how willful her thoughts were, but she couldn't stop the bleeding from her wounded heart.

"... Yeah... Yeah. Nurse uniform... hah? Yeah, I said nurse uniform. The dressing which girls in the medical industry wear... I see."

Rieze started mumbling to herself.

She was using telepathy.

Raynesia looked shocked and became embarrassed.

"The length is just right. It is about 15cm above the knee!"

Raynesia had also noticed the gaze of the others as she pulled on the skirt of her nurse uniform. But the non-elastic material was unable to hide Raynesia's thighs. Pulling it taut did nothing other than accentuate her figure.

Raynesia looked at Akatsuki with pleading eyes, asking her to 'help me' as she said 'Erm...' Akatsuki was not sure what to do either. Although Rieze was elegant and polite, she pulled such pranks from time to time. Akatsuki grunted softly at Rieze and gave her a reproaching look.

Rieze laughed merrily as she fidgeted with her ears and said "It's a joke, the telepathy was just an act." Akatsuki felt the joke was in bad taste. Raynesia also looked at Rieze unhappily.

Rieze bowed her head slightly at Raynesia.

"I'm sorry. I was feeling slightly jealous."

"Eh..."

"Because milord is devoted to the Princess Raynesia. By taking up this security detail, I can even be exempted from today's training."

Weak spot, she was poking at her weak spot.

It was indeed so.

Akatsuki and Maryele came to this conclusion after a discussion.

The People of the Land princess needed to be protected. Ever since the Libra Festival incident, there was a group lurking somewhere in Akiba that was working against the city. If they wanted to harm Akiba, they would not hesitate to drag the People of the Land into this.

For Adventurers, the worst-case scenario would just be a trip to the Cathedral to respawn after dying, but it was different for the People of the Land. If Raynesia was to come to any harm, Akatsuki did not even need to think too deeply to understand the waves that event would create. Relations with Raynesia's grandfather, the ruler of Maihama and Chairman of the League of Freedom Towns Eastal, would sour or even break down completely.

Princess Raynesia was protected by People of the Land knights sent from Maihama City. But they were People of the Land after all, their level was around 30. If any Adventurer tried to harm the princess, the escorts would not suffice.

Akiba was also guarded by the violence-detecting security system, but even if they apprehended the culprit, Raynesia would not be able to respawn if she were killed.

Akatsuki thought Shiroe had foreseen all this and that was why he assigned this task to her. It was the same with Maryele. With Shiroe out of

action during this period of time, Akatsuki could only give her all to fulfill this mission.

But when this situation was brought up from the lips of the graceful girl from D.D.D, it felt like she was poking at Raynesia's weak spot.

It was hard for Akatsuki to look straight at Raynesia whom Shiroe was worried about.

When did she became so weak? Even Akatsuki herself wasn't sure.

(This is so unlike me.)

(It shouldn't be like this.)

She should be happy that Shiroe was relying on her.

But she was comparing herself to Raynesia and the other girls.

She wanted to get stronger and live up to Shiroe's expectations.

Akatsuki had been working hard at this, but her world seemed so dark and narrow, tormenting Akatsuki.

Surrounded by the elegant laughter of others, Akatsuki felt alone.

Part 2

Night fell earlier in the winter and the sun had already set when Henrietta left the Consulate. She felt the streets of Akiba were beautiful. Although it was dimmer than Tokyo back home in the old world, compared to how dark the night of this world could be, the night scene in Akiba felt elegant and graceful.

There were several dark buildings standing tall in the blue night of Akiba. The ancient evergreen tree with branches spreading far and wide. Magic light shone warmly from high over the street. Henrietta felt this gentle, fantastical light was more pleasing than the bright, fluorescent street lamps.

"The sun is setting much earlier now."

"That's right,"

Henrietta nodded, agreeing with the blonde girl walking besides her.

Rieze took a scarf out of her Bag of Holding and wrapped it around her neck. The excess hung down her back; it appeared to be a scarf for men.

"What is with this thing? It's so tedious to use and has so many layers." Rieze complained in a cute manner as Henrietta adjusted the scarf for her.

With the lower half of her expression hidden by the scarf, Rieze muttered, "Thanks." She looked embarrassed with her shifty eyes. Henrietta laughed softly as she said, "Don't worry, it's a simple matter."

This young girl she had befriended recently looked like a perfect lady from the outside; she probably had wanted to go the route of an ice-cool beauty. She gave off a glimpse of her caring side from time to time, however, making her so cute. She was definitely much younger than she looked.

"There is no need to work so hard, you are already a fair lady."

"Eh?"

Rieze turned to face Henrietta, who just pushed Rieze along by the shoulder gently.

"Alright now, let's hurry before the place closes."

"Okay."

The duo headed in the direction of main street in this soothing atmosphere.

Henrietta was in Crescent Moon Alliance while Rieze was in D.D.D. Although they were in different guilds, the two of them often left together after the tea party at the Water Maple Consulate. Maryele and Serara left early to prepare for dinner while Henrietta and Rieze went shopping for food to supplement the meal.

After the revolution, the Adventurers ate delicious meals everyday. It was an enjoyable thing, but it was also a hassle. Only those with the subclass of Chef were able to prepare tasty food; this was less than 10 percent of the population, from what Henrietta had estimated.

After the formation of the Round Table Council, there were numerous people changing their subclass to Chef, but it was not strange for a small

guild with less than 10 members to have no Chefs. Although a guild with hundreds of members would definitely have one with the Chef subclass, preparing food for hundreds of people was a heavy burden.

To compensate for such situations, they needed to buy the food made by People of the Land either as take away or eating out.

"What do you want to buy Henrietta-san?"

"I'm getting fried chicken. Mary has been nagging me to buy some."

They chatted as they shopped for food in the mall. They timed their trip to be just before closing time, when the stores were trying to sell off their merchandise and putting things on sale.

"Fried chicken cutlets?? Did you say fried chicken cutlets? Shop at my stall, lady! Garlic-flavored just three gold for one kilogram!"

Henrietta bought three kilograms generously.

There were more than forty starving Adventurers in the Crescent Moon Alliance so this would not be enough. It would be gone before you knew it.

Rieze bought quiche with hazelnuts. For a guild with its own cooking department, these were just snacks.

The shopping mall was doing great.

Just like Henrietta and Rieze, Adventurers out shopping were flooding the mall, and you needed to watch your surroundings. Especially with the Adventurers returning from their battles who were still wearing armor or holding their staves, people required more space to move around than in the old world.

After finishing their shopping trip and squeezing their way out of the mall, Henrietta's memory of the tea party became hazy. Just walking in the mall was a tiring task, she just wanted to go back to her guild even if it were just one second faster.

Henrietta was surprised when Rieze said, "Akatsuki-san seemed rather depressed". That was the same thing that Henrietta was concerned about.

"You could tell?"

"It's that obvious."

Akatsuki had been looking languid recently. She kept to herself even when there were things troubling her and adopted a polite demeanor so most people wouldn't notice. Henrietta knew because she had been watching Akatsuki since the Catastrophe.

She was surprised that even Rieze could tell. Rieze only came into contact with Akatsuki at Raynesia's tea party. That meant they had been acquainted for half a month.

Henrietta was impressed with Rieze.

"Akatsuki-san is more senior than me right?"

Was Rieze referring to biological age or the amount of time spent playing Elder Tales? Henrietta nodded her head ambiguously.

"... I am not very sure. I heard she is a veteran Assassin. She looks like one too."

On the luscious green pathway between the mall and the guild building, Rieze continued to speak softly. In the cold winter, she was breathing out white air as she spoke.

"She came to observe D.D.D's training once. No, maybe more than once. The only time I sensed her was just that one time. But she watched our training for 4 hours."

"Is that so..." Henrietta could only answer this way.

She could guess what Akatsuki was troubled about. But to stare at the training of a major guild for hours, how did this petite young girl really feel? It must be really heartbreaking, Henrietta imagined, but she was unable to say she understood Akatsuki's pain.

Henrietta had no experience in major raids; she was a normal Adventurer. She was not a top-ranked Adventurer when Elder Tales had been just a game.

"We thought it was someone who wanted to join our guild. Although it sounds wrong for me to say this, D.D.D is a great guild. It is a good environment to be in if you want to join in major raids... And we were working hard to make it so...although the members are idiots. They start

acting like children when we encounter battles. Wrong, they are kids. Kids who are more childish than real children. Just like a bunch of Americans rushing to a BBQ, they are like kids running to fight in a raid. That's why I thought she wanted to join us."

"I don't think so."

"... Correct. I found that out pretty quickly."

Rieze stared at the ground and nodded when Henrietta corrected her.

"Anyway, I reported this to milord. There were some who thought she was a spy, but the reply was to ignore her. He is okay with her observing our training unconditionally."

She calmly stepped on a fallen leaf, leaving her boot mark on it, and continued.

"Some of the proud kids in our guild aren't happy about this. Although it is not something to worry about, milord gave me a new assignment shortly after this."

Henrietta sighed as she looked at the proud blonde girl who was a little bit shy. Having a crush on Krusty was pretty rash, right? She sympathized with Rieze by just recalling the man who made difficult demands with a nonchalant expression.

But it was the same for Akatsuki who had a thing for Shiroe.

Compared to them, Henrietta was much more reserved.

Although thinking about Shiroe stirred her heart a little, it was still within an understandable range. In this world with little entertainment, seeing Shiroe being intimate with Akatsuki or enjoying his time with Minori, she didn't feel any pain in her heart. Rather, it was more like an affirmation of happiness.

Henrietta held on to her one-sided love from a safe distance. But with her being satisfied so easily, Henrietta had no right to criticize the efforts of Rieze and Akatsuki.

"The way Krusty...sama put it, he owes a lot to Shiroe-san. That's why he gave permission for Akatsuki-san to observe. If she opted to join us, it would be a good deal, but soliciting Akatsuki-san was prohibited."

Rieze stopped the topic since she didn't know how Henrietta felt about this.

"Is that so."

Such an arrangement was definitely possible, Henrietta thought.

Shiroe probably didn't know about Krusty's thoughtful actions.

She didn't get whether guys were dense towards such things or just preferred to go in a roundabout manner. This could be easily resolved if they approached Akatsuki after noticing something was up. From Akatsuki's standpoint, she would be at a loss if they approached her.

(What Akatsuki-chan is after... is confidence.)

What she wants.

Things which some took for granted. Others wouldn't even know where to start in order to achieve it.

Maryele was such a person. This friend of Henrietta's was like a sunflower illuminating those around her with her bright nature. Henrietta didn't have the confidence to smile like that. She felt she would never have the heart and personality to shine for everyone.

This was unique to Maryele. It was something only a handful of people like Maryele possessed, but was absent from most people like Henrietta.

On the other hand, Henrietta knew people who lacked confidence no matter how hard they worked. For people like that, every second that passed by was torture. Henrietta had seen people who held such fear and self-abasing feelings. She met a few when she was graduating college. Such people were jumpy wherever they went, tired in both mind and soul. They would even bear a menacing attitude towards others.

Henrietta felt she was like this when she reflected on herself.

Unshakable confidence... She didn't have the confidence to safeguard the things that were most important to her. This confidence could only be earned as a result of experience and effort.

For example, maintaining your friendship with others.

Or holding a job without troubling your company.

Getting married... With such a chaotic setting in place, even going to a matchmaking session was impossible. But worrying about the love life of your friends while being the accountant of a guild was a pretty good way to kill time.

Becoming the hero who would bring everyone back home would not fall on her. To protect her juniors with the things she had learned-- that was the role Henrietta gave herself.

Instead of brooding on tasks she couldn't do, she worked on things she could.

This was not anything major, just a normal conclusion by a normal person.

"Not getting what you want is a common thing in this world."

Rieze said as she buried her face in the big scarf designed for men.

That's right, this was obvious.

This was all too normal for commoners.

This was the life most people lived, growing accustomed to the fact of not getting what you wanted. Henrietta was used to it. It was probably the same for Rieze.

But that didn't mean there were no complaints.

They were used to not getting what they want and there was nothing they could do about it. That didn't mean they could accept this fact so simply. It stopped you in your tracks. It was impossible to go on without adjusting to this, but going with the flow made you nothing but a walking corpse.

Henrietta thought Akatsuki was shining brilliantly.

This foolish girl was weak. It was a weakness which Henrietta thought of as part of 'growing up', a weakness of getting hurt easily. It was a weakness, but also an asset.

Henrietta also knew this weakness was tormenting Akatsuki.

Henrietta did not wish for her beloved Akatsuki to suffer this pain.

Unfortunately, she thought it was impossible for her to help.

She didn't know where to start and was aware that this was not something others could help with. Henrietta reflected about herself. She was not sure how she became like this in the first place.

"The only thing we can do is stay by her side."

"That's... true."

Rieze probably knew this too and answered curtly.

(That pitch-black Kuroe-sama is really...!)

Henrietta let out a big sigh without Rieze noticing.

With his close ally in a bind, what was that incredibly smart youth doing right now? The Shiroe who was able to see through any schemes seemed to be blind when facing this type of situation.

... Or maybe, this had nothing to do with his eyesight, he might just be wearing binoculars he couldn't remove.

Henrietta, who was thinking about slightly rude things, smiled bitterly.

She wanted to treat Akatsuki better. Let's bring clothes for Akatsuki to dress up tomorrow. The cloud cleared in Henrietta's heart when she thought about this. She browsed through the catalog in her mind. This was all for Akatsuki's sake, she convinced herself.

This was just another peaceful indigo night in Akiba.

Part 3

On this very same night, a group of people wanted to change the peaceful night scene with their guts and will.

Known as "the most glamorous guild in Yamato server", this was the harem guild with girls of iron discipline, West Wind Brigade.

It had a high ratio of ladies to men, but this didn't mean they were all girls. Just like its name suggested, the ground floor lobby was glamorous as usual with dozens of members focused on preparations.

Most of the members were girls, but the atmosphere was not sweet.

With their limbs clad in armor, they were a gathering of beautiful young ladies ready for battle. They chatted in soft voices as they looked at their leader, Soujiro.

The boyish Soujiro surveyed the lobby. The group who would 'sortie' tonight in Akiba comprised of 24 people. With four parties of six Adventurers, they had organized themselves into a full raid. All those present were level 90 and above.

"Everyone."

Soujiro's voice raised the tension in the hall. Aside from the 24-girl raid group, other members were present to lend their support. There were twice the number of raid group gathered here.

"I have stressed this many times, the enemy is of unknown origin. Please keep your guard up. He is more powerful than any single one of us... including me. Please don't take him on alone. Also, moving alone is prohibited. Maintain formation and report in periodically. The contact person will be Nazuna."

"Yes, since we are doing this, let's get it right. Don't push yourself, everyone. Once you engage the target, assume formation alpha and drag the fight out. We assigned two healers to each party, so we are lacking in terms of firepower. Don't assume you can accomplish anything with just one party. The mission objective is to report back any sightings, and slow him down, okay?"

Nazuna was wearing loose home clothes as she spoke slowly.

If there was a need to be nervous, she could leave the butterflies to the parties who were going out to fight.

No problem. She trusted her comrades.

The secret to the success of raids by small guilds like the West Wind Brigade, as opposed to major guilds like Black Sword Knights or D.D.D, lay in their unity and common goals.

Right now, West Wind Brigade was fueled by anger in their quest to apprehend the culprit.

Nazuna, who bundled her black hair behind her, inspected the members who were moving out. They had made ample preparations in terms of equipment and tactics. Nazuna nodded at the members who promised to stick to the plan.

"Well then, your shift will be over in two hours. The second raid group's formation and preparation will be done here. There will be supper when you come back, look forward to it. After a two-hour break you will need to move out again, so don't get too relaxed. Like Souji said, the enemy is overwhelmingly strong. Don't forget this point. Okay, I leave the rest to you, Souji."

"Hmm... What else is there to say? What I want to talk about has already been said. Alright then, there is only one goal. The culprit who assaulted our family... cut him down."

Soujirou was a young man that gave the impression of the sunlight in spring.

He was smiling at everyone as usual without a hint of panic in his speech, but his words were ice-cold, freezing the mood in the hall. A female Cleric who seemed to shiver from this cold air squeezed out a reply from her stomach. Not a single member was concerned that night had fallen.

The four parties rushed out of the hall in high spirits.

The West Wind Brigade guild hall incorporated a Japanese style in its layout.

The place wasn't like this in the beginning; it had slowly morphed into its current state because of the interests of Soujirou and his members. In order to conduct troop inspections before the patrol, the furniture had been moved out of the way.

Soujirou pulled a wooden chair into the hall and sat on it.

He was on standby, but had no intention of going back to his room or the dining hall.



"They are making pork rib soup in the kitchen." Nazuna informed Soujirou out of concern, but he just shook his head with a smile.

(It would be great if Shiroe-san or Kazuhiko-san were here.)

Nazuna put her hand on her chin.

She had been like this since the old world; she was taller than normal girls and had a voluptuous body. Although it was not at the gravure level, her figure was still great. Some commented that 'it looks pleasing to the eyes', but she felt troubled by it. With her feet shoulder-width apart and her arms crossed, she looked older and more mature.

As a founding member with a helpful nature, Nazuna earned the trust of those around her. Because of this, Nazuna was recognized as the vice-guildmaster in West Wind Brigade. Nazuna thought that compared to the charismatic leadership of Soujirou, she was more comfortable running the guild from behind the scenes.

The members were all good kids who adored Nazuna, and she loved them back. West Wind Brigade was family to her. Living together after the Catastrophe made her feel that everyone was family.

But beneath the kind and warm mask Soujirou wore all the time, she caught glimpses of his serious expression, making Nazuna feel bashful as she reminisced about old times.

But Soujirou was right this time.

The opponent was the Murderer threatening Akiba in the night. As one of the eleven guilds of the Round Table Council, West Wind Brigade had the obligation to defend the security of Akiba. Patrolling the streets was expected of prominent battle guilds and Nazuna agreed with this.

Furthermore, the Murderer had laid his hands on a comrade from the West Wind Brigade.

Kyouko respawned at the cathedral. She didn't lose much in terms of memory or items. Kyouko feared the Murderer but she could still face him in combat, that was what she said. But an assault was still an assault. The murderer laid his hands on the family of Nazuna and Soujirou.

Unforgivable.

That's how Nazuna felt.

She knew Soujiro shared her wrath. Although Soujiro's judgment could be too direct at times, that was his nature since the Tea Party days. It sounded good when you described it as no hesitation or worries, but on the flip side it meant he was merciless and cruel.

Nazuna thought Soujiro was not as warm and gentle as the ladies of Akiba portrayed him to be. No, he might feel like a warm and kind young man, but that was not his true nature.

He just happened to act this way.

Soujiro was gentle to women. He acted this way to almost all ladies.

He was not doing this out of kindness. This was simply the way he was.

It was the same with his instructions to take revenge on the Murderer who harmed his girl. He didn't do it because he particularly liked Kyouko. He was just this type of young man.

This was a principle of sorts. When his mechanical thinking made a decision, even Nazuna could not influence this aspect of him. Nazuna could delay or call off this decision though. She could advise him to 'link up with Black Sword Knights first' or to 'leave this issue to the Round Table Council'.

But Nazuna could not warn Soujiro or guide his growth.

The only one who could influence Soujiro at that level was Shiroe or Kazuhiko.

Because the idea of protecting girls was deeply rooted in Soujiro's thinking, Nazuna's advice was unable to reach him.

Soujiro was gentle to girls. This was not just a good point but a bad point he needed to correct.

Following him to West Wind Brigade, Nazuna could be seen as one of Soujiro's girlfriends.

But for Nazuna, she thought of Soujiro as a kid brother.

Someone that made her worry and she could not leave alone.

For Soujirou to act like a guildmaster normally and wear this facial expression was just a streak of lucky coincidences. Nazuna wouldn't be surprised if this young man, Soujirou Seta, destroyed himself or his guild somehow. That was just the way Soujirou Seta was.

(But I love him. I love with all my heart.)

Nazuna fidgeted with Soujirou's hair subconsciously as she thought.

Although she really liked him, there was no mistake in saying this young man was abnormal.

He could even rival the Murderer.

That's why he could manage a guild with 90+ girls and even lead them to the top of the competitive raiding charts.

"What is it?" Soujirou asked Nazuna with his eyes wide open.

He was worried about the silent Nazuna. Nazuna felt troubled as she smiled at him. She couldn't help it because they were family. She would make up for the things that Soujirou lacked and avenge her other family member, Kyouko, who fell under the blade of the Murderer.

Part 4

The white fog was settling near her feet, even the smell of the wind was becoming gentle.

The night seemed as dense as a drop curtain which gradually turned transparent and gentle. This was the feeling of the coming dawn.

Although the streets of Akiba were still covered in darkness, the pressure was much less than in the tense and heavy night.

The sky slowly turned dark blue. Even though everything was quiet, time was still passing slowly.

Akatsuki was tired after patrolling the whole night.

Although Adventurers wouldn't get tired just from staying up one night, searching for the enemy on high-alert all this while was a heavy burden mentally.

(I'm hungry...)

Akatsuki thought.

She really wanted to drink a warm bowl of corn soup.

Nyanta's special soup with lots of corn inside.

But she was on the crumbling overhead bridge right now. Her comrades from Log Horizon were still sleeping in these early hours before dawn, so she couldn't expect warmth from anyone.

The late night patrol was done behind her companions' backs. She was envious of a certain female member in her guild, and wanted to obtain strength that could rival that of the major battle guilds. That was why she was leaving every night to track the Murderer. She couldn't bring herself to tell her companions about this.

As she surveyed the streets that were gradually turning bright, Akatsuki sighed.

These unspeakable feelings and exhaustion, Akatsuki knew herself that this was the expected result of her willful investigation. The desire to become stronger was to feed her ego in the first place. Shiroe and Naotsugu had never asked this of her. And they definitely didn't request her to track the murderer, Akatsuki knew she was acting without any basis.

She might witness the battles of high-class guilds if she hunted the Murderer.

And she might see them using 'Over level'.

If things went well, she might get a clue about learning it.

These were all assumptions. A plan that was full of 'maybes'.

Akatsuki understood it too, and it got harder for her to share her thoughts with her friends.

Passing through the main street, Akatsuki went along the flyover leading to the center of Akiba.

The streets of Akiba welcomed the morning after the darkness retreated. The breeze in this winter morning was chilly enough to cut through your

skin, stripping the warmth from Akatsuki's face. Her body was freezing from wearing her ninja garb for the whole night. It was fine when she was moving around with a tense mind, but she became cold when she stopped and looked around the city aimlessly in the coming dawn.

She was moody.

Of course she was, she had wandered the streets for the whole night with nothing to show for it.

Akatsuki made her way up some concrete debris covered in moss and stood on top of the rubble. This had probably been the platform of the central metro station, but was now a courtyard in the sky supported by the trees. The air was still freezing, but the wind had been blocked by the trees, giving Akatsuki a slight reprieve.

This large building was not an independent zone, but an open zone within the streets of Akiba. There was no set entrance; anyone could enter just by jumping from the flyover.

Akatsuki walked down the stairs onto the central square lost in thought... She continued to think as she sat on a rotting bench.

Akatsuki was not that tired.

She just didn't feel like moving.

She felt her stomach become heavy when she sat, as if there were something solidifying inside, an unbearable sensation.

Akatsuki was surprised as well.

Why was she sitting on a bench and looking at this scenery? The fact that she was at a dead end was right in front of her.

Akatsuki kicked a pebble. There were twisted ancient trees growing all around, and pebbles lay all over this place that used to be a platform. From the look of the birds flying off, she must have startled them.

The gloomy Akatsuki thought about many things.

Things about guilds, matters regarding Shiroe, stuff about the idiotic low-class Naotsugu, Nyanta and his delicious meals, things about her juniors, stuff about Crescent Moon Alliance, and all the enemies she had fought so far.

And also matters regarding Minori.

A girl among girls. Petite and cute. Cuddly like a ball. Outgoing, wasn't shy and had proper manners... but that wasn't much. Akatsuki thought this kind of cuteness would just get her a bit of popularity in school, and she could be too direct sometimes.

She didn't know how to cook or where to buy nice clothes since she was a middle schooler. Her taste in bags was childish. She got so excited when talking to Shiroe, her high pitch voice definitely irritated Shiroe.

Akatsuki bit her lips.

What am I thinking about.

So shallow.

She was surprised at how narrow her mind was.

Her reflection in the mirror was twisted and ugly. The bitterness known as jealousy ate at Akatsuki. Minori hadn't done anything wrong.

Minori had never been hostile towards Akatsuki. But Akatsuki belittled Minori's actions akin to a brat who didn't know her place. Even though her heart knew it wasn't true. Although Akatsuki knew Minori was a hardworking and cute junior. Akatsuki couldn't help feeling jealous of this capable middle school girl.

She couldn't stand brooding over this by herself. The sensation of jealousy that was suppressed when everyone was together spread out in her heart, drowning her like an out of control torrent.

Akatsuki took a few deep breaths.

She loosened her clenched fist slowly.

The shadows of the tree with all its leaves fallen in the winter as well as the shade of the evergreen coniferous tree covered the courtyard.

A sound like a bell chime came from somewhere.

It was the bird from before. In these abandoned ancient ruins, the winter air had a clean feel about it. Even the dry air that turned your breath into white fog was an important part accentuating this beautiful scene.

In this dazzling white light, Akatsuki felt she was a dark stain. A stain that spread if you rubbed at it. Even the black hair Akatsuki was so proud of became disagreeable when she thought this way.

Akatsuki thought that maybe Shiroe didn't like black hair, preferring brighter hair colors like Minori's instead. Thinking this way made her stomach feel hard like a rock.

Akatsuki knew very well Shiroe wouldn't discriminate anyone by their hair color. Shiroe wouldn't be concerned with physical traits and be biased towards anyone over small things like hair color.

The reason Akatsuki was pondering about something as dull as 'does he prefer brighter hair colors' was because of jealousy.

The jealousy in Akatsuki was staining her image of Shiroe.

Akatsuki was belittling Shiroe because of her jealousy right now.

(What right do I have to address him as lord?)

Akatsuki understood why she sat on this bench.

Because she didn't want to return to Log Horizon's guild house.

Just like a gradeschooler playing truant from cram school.

It was funny when you think about it. It was escapism on the level of children.

Akatsuki was cold, pained and in a miserable mood. Even though she had such an important home and happiness, in her quest to protect this happiness, she spent the whole night chasing after a source of power. But this resulted in her finding it hard to return. Akatsuki reproached herself, this was putting the cart before the horse.

Minori, Tohya, and the junior team were out hunting and would be camping out tonight.

She wouldn't see them even if she returned now, and she knew Nyanta would welcome her warmly.

So all her talk about not wanting to go home was just Akatsuki being temperamental.

Akatsuki was aware she was just being proud.

But she couldn't let it go.

(I want to see my lord...)

Akatsuki thought. This wish seemed to bind her chest tightly.

She wanted to see Shiroe. Even just for a bit, she wanted to talk to him. She wanted to get close and tug on his cloak. She wanted to pour black rose tea into Shiroe's tea cup. Just like the times when they sat on the couch and looked at the scenery outside the window. When Shiroe made complicated faces while reading complicated letters, she tried to imitate his face.

But she couldn't fulfill her wish here. She didn't feel qualified to live peacefully by Shiroe's side with the pride she was holding on to. If she returned now, she would always be the 'bonus item' that came along with Shiroe.

Akatsuki thought that was fine too.

Staying by Shiroe's side, basking in the sun together with him, living as his ninja was also bliss.

But that was just self deception.

Being satisfied just with this was just being bashful. Minori had taught her this.

A swallow that was unable to fly wouldn't be able to keep up with Shiroe one day. There would be no other way but to leave.

Her thoughts were similar to before, going round in circles. No matter what, she was just thinking about herself. She hated herself for being so self centered.

There wouldn't be anyone who liked a girl like that. Always thinking about herself and unable to make friends. That's why she couldn't face Shiroe now.

That was the instruction Shiroe gave her.

"... I will stay at an inn today."

Akatsuki forced her legs to support her heavy body.

She felt drained even though she was not tired, this must be a psychological illusion.

The winter breeze blew across these foreign lands without any answers for Akatsuki.

Part 5

Raynesia closed her eyes from the cold.

It was obvious that closing her eyes wouldn't relieve the chill.

It was rare of her to visit the streets of Akiba like this.

Even though she was posted, or exiled, here, Raynesia was still the 2nd daughter of the Corwen clan which chaired the League of Freedom Towns Eastal, one of the 2 Dukedoms in Yamato. Because of security reasons, she seldom went out. Even if she left, she would be going by carriage, not walking on the streets in casual wear like this.

If Maryele from Crescent Moon Alliance hadn't suddenly told her 'Let's eat breakfast outside today!' she wouldn't have even left her home.

Elissa and her guards would usually oppose her from leaving, but this was Akiba. With a few veteran Adventurers by her side, she would be much safer than staying in the Water Maple Consulate. For some reason, Elissa had speedily made preparations for her to go out, so she was unable to decline.

"It's so fluffy."

"You should wear your hat."

And so, Raynesia walked down the streets of Akiba between Maryele and Rieze.

She was wearing a short coat with soft fur today.

In the end, Raynesia was not aware of what she had in her wardrobe.

Her maid would choose her clothes and change them several times a day, which was the norm for noble ladies. But because of Raynesia's lack of interest in fashion, it felt extreme.

That's just the way she was. And she didn't feel any joy from changing her clothes. If no one bothered her, she was confident of spending the whole year in a one piece linen dress.

Raynesia had gone through education as a noble and understood she needed to dress appropriately according to the time and place.

Even though it was a hassle, Raynesia knew her silver hair was rare. Clothes that fit her silver head were hard to find, and unfortunately didn't include pyjamas.

That's why Raynesia was not sure of what clothing she had, she only had the idea that there were all sorts of dresses inside.

"The anti-cold equipment for low levels are limited after all."

In the group walking together, someone spoke to Raynesia from behind. It was a girl named Mikakage.

She was also a member of the tea party, a friendly and bubbly young girl.

"That's right."

Raynesia answered simply.

Raynesia replied so obediently because Mikakage was one of the people she would not go up against. Not because Mikakage was an Adventurer, but she was a Chef who brought all sorts of delicacies when she visited, so Raynesia didn't want to upset her.

Raynesia was not too sure, but there seemed to be 2 sorts of Chefs among Adventurers.

One had a high Chef level, but was mediocre as a cook. Another type was a real cook with both skills and Chef levels... That's how it was. The Chef level was supposed to reflect the skills of cooks, but others would criticize them as 'waste of talent' or 'fake Chefs', which confounded Raynesia.

Even though Raynesia was not familiar with the culture of Adventurers, she knew that Mikakage was a real Chef. The delicacies she brought along all tasted great.

Confectioneries that were so fine, desserts similar to gems. Aside from the snacks, the pork miso soup and mushroom rice she brought occasionally were great as well.

Mikakage described sweets as works of art, while other food was entertainment. Raynesia could only tilt her head in confusion. She felt all her food had a nice and gentle taste.

Mikakage took off the scarf around Raynesia's neck and hung a strange ornament on it. The little fairy that was always following Mikakage tried her best to catch a glimpse. The ornament was a doll of a puppy. It appeared round and lazy, looking cute in Raynesia's eyes.

"I didn't modify it much, but how is it? Does it feel warmer?"

"Yes, it is very warm."

People of the Land couldn't make such a small and delicate doll. The best they could do was wood carvings. This was the first time Raynesia was wearing such a decoration. Compared to jewelries and ribbons, Raynesia felt this was closer to the dressing of an Adventurer.

"Pretty."

Mikakage nodded in agreement. Maryele leaned over from behind and said "That's great!" with a beautiful smile.

The lady Maryele was also a frequent visitor of the Water Maple Consulate.

She always brought all sort of clothes, making Raynesia think that she was a fashion designer of some tribe. But after asking around, she found out that Maryele was one of the 11 members of the Round Table Council. One of the governing clan leaders of Akiba.

Raynesia was tense in the beginning, but grew accustomed to her.

When Raynesia found out that Maryele was from a governing clan, she conversed with her like a lord. But Maryele always treated Raynesia like a dress-up doll, or chatted about idle things in the city or held mini-concerts.

Maryele was always cheerful, she liked parties and was always smiling.

The first to address Raynesia as "Sia-chan" was her. Her family called her "Raysi" at home sometimes, but no one addressed her as "Sia." Raynesia was troubled in the beginning, but got used to it eventually.

The tea party with the female Adventurers was now part of Raynesia's daily schedule.

Raynesia was the "Winter Rose of Eastal," but "Sia" was an ignorant People of the Land girl posted to this Adventurer city. Of course she was an aristocrat and an ambassador, and would imitate businessmen when negotiating business sometimes, but she was not the "Winter Rose of Eastal."

Raynesia noticed that the blond girl who was matching her pace in front of her worrisome steps had turned around to look at her. This girl was Rieze, from one of the 11 governing clans D.D.D, whose leader Krusty, who was also the leader of the order of the knights, was the bane of Raynesia. She seemed to hold a high rank within the clan.

Rieze also frequented Raynesia's tea party, an intelligent maiden. Her actions were closest to the nobles' among the participants. But compared to the inflexible socialites of Eastal aristocrats, she was much more enlightened.

She had learned the word enlightened from Rieze.

Its meaning was like 'wearing clothes that wouldn't constrict your stomach and enjoying Custard Dorayaki.'

What a great word.

In Raynesia's eyes, all the Adventurers were amazing.

Not just Raynesia, probably all the People of the Land felt the same way. Elissa had once sighed and said, "Now that you mentioned it, I forgot they were Adventurers."

Adventurers were too different from them, it was too hard for her to comprehend.

Raynesia had met with many People of the Land, and all of them asked her similar questions.

'... What are Adventurers like?'

'... How do we get along with Adventurers?'

After moving into Akiba and becoming a bridge between the People of the Land and Adventurers, she met with People of the Land guests everyday, trying to discuss and resolve their problems. She would introduce Adventurers to them to do business, or find Adventurers who were willing to take on quests. Raynesia didn't think she was up to the task, but since no one else was doing this, she had to do this.

Even if others asked her what Adventurers were like, Raynesia also didn't know the answer. Among the People of the Land, the most ignorant one might be Raynesia. She met with Adventurers more than any other, so the things she didn't know were ever increasing.

But she understood several things.

Adventurers were just Adventurers.

Raynesia thought the biggest mistake the People of the Land nobles made during the conference in the Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice was to treat Adventurers like aristocrats.

Adventurers were not nobles, treating them as nobles wouldn't make things go smoother. Adventurers were also not peasants or knights, they were not even People of the Land. So you couldn't treat them with the expectation and culture of the People of the Land.

Raynesia thought that was the reason the conference had ended in failure.

Adventurers were just Adventurers, there was no other term that could describe them.

But Raynesia was able to use terms to define most of the people around her. Duke was a duke, baron was a baron, knight was a knight, a servant was a servant. Citizens were people living in the city, villagers lived in a village. Hunters hunted, lumberjacks cut down trees.

Everyone had their duties, living within their area of responsibility. This was something that was obvious. Raynesia was Raysi, the granddaughter of a duke, the winter rose princess. She had never questioned this all her life, and never resisted, thinking that all this was natural.

But she sensed that she couldn't comprehend Adventurers using these standards. She might not know the correct answer, but she realized she had to find out the meaning behind their existence and their duties in this world.

The members of clan Crescent Moon Alliance included Chefs. If she could classify Adventurers so simply, it would be easier to deal with the Adventurers. Just like the knights of Maihama, the employed maids moving into the castle, or arrogant young nobles.

But Maryele, Rieze, and Mikakage were too special, Raynesia was unable to do that.

All the Adventurers were like special gems polished personally by the hands of god. All of them were different, shining in the crowd.

"Hmmm? What is it?"

Maryele turned around and asked with concern.

Raynesia smiled and said "Nothing." Mikakage asked after seeing her reaction "Already hungry?" making everyone laugh. (Do I look that hungry?) Raynesia was a bit worried. Adventurers always carried snacks in their bags, and everyone was taking out something for Raynesia to eat.

Raynesia's group turned north at the junction.

"This way?" "Yeah, that's right."

Maryele and Rieze who were chatting were dressed lightly.

Unlike People of the Land, Adventurers preferred clothing that let them move with ease, even in winter. Maryele was wearing a short skirt, exposing her pants underneath. Raynesia thought that would be very cold, but Maryele didn't seem to mind.

Rieze was wearing a coat with a scarf, but she was still wearing a white shirt with a tight skirt. Compared to them, Raynesia and Elissa, who was standing behind her, were dressed in thick layers.

Raynesia saw Akatsuki suddenly.

Maryele asked Mikakage: "Is Milky Margaret this way?" Mikakage ran off to scout ahead, so the 2 ladies who were chatting with Raynesia went ahead.

As Raynesia was catching her breath, she saw Akatsuki appear in the entrance of a building.

Akatsuki was biting her lips.

The petite figure left in the opposite direction, looking like a lost child.

All sorts of emotion rose in Raynesia's heart. She felt as if she had been spending several hours in the night looking at the ceiling.

Raynesia wanted to call out, but the words were stuck in her throat before materializing.

She was not sure what to say.

Raynesia felt like vines that were shrinking because of the water collected on its leaves. Akatsuki seemed to have lost all her vitality and was dragging a heavy heart. This was a side of her that Raynesia had never seen.

She looks like a child.

That was what Raynesia thought.

Raynesia always thought this black-haired girl to be a short sword made from obsidian.

With the beauty of a gem and the strength Raynesia could not fathom.

Raynesia pondered with her brain, which she felt was mediocre, but gave up. Akatsuki was gone anyway, lost in the crowd. Akatsuki didn't notice Raynesia and the others, as they passed each other at a distance.

At this point, she felt perplexed and stuffy.

But this was nothing unusual.

Raynesia had experienced all sorts of emotions before. Most of the guests were not welcomed by Raynesia, but she knew from her youth how it felt like to hide in her blanket and immerse herself in the darkness. She was confident about hiding in her blanket.

Raynesia shook her head to refresh herself.

In the city of Akiba, she was needed to be ready to act as a negotiation consultant. She needed to change her mood and refresh herself often.

"Hey~ Sia-chan~ what were you doing? It's this way~"

This voice made Raynesia hurry along with her troubled steps.

Part 6

"Princess~ Princess~?"

Elissa called out to her mistress.

She tried calling for Raynesia since the room was silent, but Raynesia just stayed on her couch, depressed.

She was downcast and at a loss, her long silver hair flowing down her round shoulders like a waterfall. This young lady's sorrowful air could make the corporal whose face was full of scars and who was known as 'the Orc' encourage her gently: "Don't be so depressed, I will help you."

Lady Henrietta had once described her as 'a puppy caught in the rain'.

It was a dreamy, lonely, melancholic and gloomy figure.

The perfect display of a frail and cuddly person.

But Elissa knew very clearly.

Raynesia right now was so exhausted she didn't want to move.

"Prin~cess."

"Elissa...?"

Raynesia raised her chin and gazed upwards.

The contours of her face were as smooth as a boiled egg, with wet eyes.

Don't misunderstand. Her teary eyes were not because she remembered something sad or was moved emotionally, it was because she was holding back a yawn.

"Alright. Aren't you tired? Your humble servant Elissa will prepare your bedroom in just a bit, please wait a moment. Would you like some tea? Maybe dessert?"

Elissa asked her.

It had been some time since her lunch with the group of lady Adventurers, it was not surprising if she were hungry now.

But the princess named Raynesia, because of her metabolism or some other reason, just wouldn't get fat no matter how much she ate. Be it meat or cakes, her skin was smooth like a baby's. She could eat all she wanted without getting fat, which made others envious.

After the Catastrophe and the Akiba revolution that followed, all the dishes had wonderful flavors. With half a year gone, the revolution had penetrated deep into the People of the Land's society. From the nobles to the peasants, everyone was enjoying this whole new experience.

Because of the delicious food, some people might overeat. Most of the People of the Land aristocrats had gained weight. But Raynesia was the exception and didn't fatten up, making Elissa feel complicated. Elissa limited herself to one cake every 3 days, as she didn't have Raynesia's metabolic rate.

"No thanks."

Raynesia shook her head lightly, leaning exhaustedly on the couch, supporting her face with the back of the couch. If a hotblooded apprentice knight with a crush on Raynesia were to see her like this, he would definitely have a nosebleed.

(Although it doesn't mean anything to me.)

Elissa approached Raynesia casually, lifting Raynesia's feet with indoor slippers on and put them on the couch after bending them at the knees. Raynesia didn't resist as she lay on the couch.

For the beautiful princess of Maihama, this was an unladylike pose. If a man happened to see it, they might misunderstand. No matter how she really was on the inside, Raynesia was educated to be a princess, so even her family wouldn't have the chance to see this pose of hers.

(I didn't want to see that either.)

After re-positioning Raynesia's feet, Elissa used a broom to sweep under the coffee table and couch.

"Princess."

"What is it?"

"What did you eat today?"

"Cream soup."

"Ehhh... was it Adventurer style?"

"It seemed to be the meat of 'Flame Boars'. It was great."

"It's so festive recently."

"That's right."

Elissa cleaned the room thoroughly while conversing casually with the princess.

This room was cleaned daily, so it didn't take too much time. Cleaning was a chore Elissa had to do as a maid, but there was no need to go to the extent of lifting her mistress's feet onto the couch. Maids who did that to normal nobles would probably be executed. Because Raynesia was a clueless person... correction, a generous person, that's why Elissa dared to do that.

But there seemed to be a tea party everyday, if she finished up now, the maid on duty the next day would have an easier time. There would definitely be female Adventurers visiting tomorrow as well. Especially the petite lady Akatsuki who had dropped by without fail these 10 days.

"You look very tired today."

"Yeah."

Raynesia answered lazily.

She must be exhausted. But that's natural. Lady Henrietta and Lady Maryele had been toying with her after all, dressing her up after coming back from breakfast. Elissa smiled bitterly as she recalled the cries of her mistress begging for mercy.

Making sure her mistress was appropriately dressed was Elissa's duty.

Managing Raynesia's wardrobe was also Elissa's responsibility.

Her mistress was very beautiful, so planning her daily dressing was a challenge.

For example, after meeting with a certain merchant, she couldn't wear the same thing when meeting the same merchant again, or they would think the women of the dukedom were always wearing the same clothes and look down on them. That's why she had to plan Raynesia's clothes for morning, noon, and evening. She had to keep a detailed log of the accessories she wore too, that was one of the duties of a maid.

For People of the Land aristocrats and merchants, they could just follow the usual protocol. Although it was tedious preparatory work like solving a jigsaw puzzle, it was not much when they thought of it as part of their job.

But it was harder when dealing with Adventurers, since they had nothing to refer to. If it was a formal audience, they could match the dresses according to the purpose of the audience or the customary protocol. But the tea parties recently were private events, so dressing too formal might upset the Adventurers. But even if she could pick any casual clothes, Elissa was not sure what was the standard for 'casual' among Adventurers.

The clothes Adventurers wore varied too much. Most Adventurers differentiated between combat armor and their street clothes, but there were no obvious guidelines. There were some who lived their lives wearing metal armor all day.

There was another problem. Elissa wanted to know the preference and customs of the Adventurers, and investigated the dresses and clothes that couldn't really be defined as dresses in Akiba, but the pricing was a mess. The Corwen clan was a grand noble clan, so even if the equipment of Adventurers was expensive, they could still afford them. But Elissa couldn't understand the pricing standard. 2 similar silk shirts could have a 50-fold price difference.

The store clerk explained that the materials were different.

The more Elissa learned about this, the more surprised she got. A pair of boots made from the leather of a Gorgon, or the breast plate for a woman made from 'Fairnacht' were sold by Adventurers in stores. They needed to hunt high level mythical beasts to craft such clothes. Even the Dukedom with their top-level wealth among the People of the Land could not afford to buy all of them.

The dressing carnival was actually the result of a discussion between Elissa and Maryele. Thanks to Maryele assuring her 'just leave everything to me', and bringing plenty of clothes over, the wardrobe Raynesia could use for Adventurers was expanding.

To achieve this, Elissa did not hesitate in sending her mistress to the dress-up festival. If she didn't do this, Raynesia wouldn't participate actively. Elissa thought this was a good dose of medicine for Raynesia.

Elissa held a lot of respect for Raynesia. She remembered the brave front Raynesia put up at the lord's conference, making her proud and inclined to applaud her mistress. But Raynesia was basically lazy and cowardly, a girl with a pillow for head (meaning her brain was full of feathers).

But it was hard to say whether she bore this respect when serving Raynesia.

(Well, this is all for Raynesia-sama's sake.)

Elissa thought as she spread out the rug.

Not just clothes.

Having a friend of the same gender about your age was an invaluable experience too.

Putting aside Elissa, who was the daughter of a low-ranking noble, it would be hard for Raynesia from the Corwen dukedom to find a suitable spouse.

Elissa reminisced on Raynesia with her perfect smile in the Palace of Maihama or the Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice. The society of noblemen was very strict. Especially for young girls, even a small scandal might be a fatal wound.

In order to survive under the gossiping court sparrows that were ever watching, Raynesia learned graceful manners. To protect her grandfather and her family name, the mask Raynesia chose to wear was perfect. In the end, she won the legendary fame of the 'Winter Rose of Eastal'.

But because of this, Raynesia did not have anyone she could call a friend. Although Raynesia was close to Elissa, she was just a maid after all.

"Although you seem so reluctant, you seem to be having a good time."

"What...?"

"Elissa is glad you have made some friends."

This was true.

Elissa felt that Raynesia had a richer variety of expressions in this half month.

"But they are not friends right?"

... But she got a surprising answer.

"What are they then? The princess seems so happy... Although it was troubling at times..."

"They are Adventurers."

Facing Elissa's query, Raynesia answered without much thought.

"This is not an enjoyable chat. Adventurers are different from us. Way too different. All the customs I know don't apply to them. If we can't convey our emotions in the form of words, they won't understand us, that was the only way to converse with them."

This was correct.

Adventurers held no reservations in terms of social status. They would even invite Elissa when holding a tea party. Elissa had gained some knowledge after getting posted to Akiba. Lady Henrietta, who held the same attitude towards work like her, Rieze, who felt a bit like her sister back in town, and the hardworking Serara whom she wanted to have as a colleague.

But like Raynesia mentioned, there was a big difference between Adventurers and the People of the Land. There were times when they couldn't come to terms, and they couldn't figure out what the other was doing. But that didn't mean they couldn't work together.

Elissa had learned all this from Raynesia herself.

So she asked Raynesia.

"But you seem so..."

"You have to convey your feelings of joy even if it is just a tiny bit, same with sadness. You have to bear gratitude when you feel happy. You can't convey your emotions if you don't do that. That's what I am doing. Elissa understands too right? The real me is lazy and cowardly... and irresponsible. Be it social circles or nobles, whatever is fine. I will be happy in a life where I can nap everyday. I don't understand something like that anyway."

Raynesia muttered in a bored tone.

"This is work."

"... Is that so."

"..."

Raynesia shifted her gaze and leaned on the back of the couch. To describe it in words, she thought it was a bother and didn't want to care about anything, an irresponsible attitude. But her lazy demeanor was as moving as a painting, the privilege of being a beautiful young lady.

The only one who could see this side of the princess was Elissa.

Playing the role of the perfect lady in public, it was the same with all the People of the Land noblewomen. She showed the forthright side of her before the female Adventurers, but she couldn't help sitting properly like a cat ill at ease. This might be the psychological barrier the unfathomable princess put up unconsciously.

(... And there is also that man.)

Raynesia thought about that bulky young man with sand-colored hair. Raynesia seemed to have opened her heart to that youth. But her inability to lie played a big part, she had no say in this from the very beginning.

Was there anything Raynesia wished for?

She wanted to convey her joy even if it were just a small happiness.

That's how Raynesia put it.

But didn't that mean she was happy about it after all?

Even though she was so exhausted that she dozed off before dinner, she could get up from bed the next morning without the maids waking her. She picked her dresses carefully as she looked forward to the day. Elissa felt that she was not treating this as work, but as an enjoyable activity with friends.

Raynesia was living every day happily after coming to this place filled with Adventurers.

But Raynesia herself, who was looking out the window at the scenery dyed blue outside, was unaware of this simple fact. Maybe she was avoiding the term friends. Or maybe this was the first time she was experiencing this? Or she had already given up on this aspect of life. Elissa didn't know.

Elissa felt sad when she thought about this.

With her beauty, plenty of compliments, wealth and social status, this young girl seemed to give off the feeling of giving up sometimes. If the courage she displayed at the lord's conference stemmed from her disillusioned heart, that seemed so sad.

Raynesia who was gazing out the window looked dreamy and beautiful, with a bored expression on her face. Elissa sighed seeing her mistress this way.

Elissa wanted to help her mistress, but she knew that advising her normally was futile.

Elissa knew very well that Raynesia's stubbornness was at the same level as her laziness.

CHAPTER.

FALLEN GUARDIAN

[墜 ち た 守 護 者]



▶ NAME: RIEZE

▶ LEVEL: 90

▶ RACE: HALF-ALV

▶ CLASS: SORCERER

▶ HP: 8758

▶ MP: 13137

▶ ITEM 1:

[PRIDE OF QUEEN]

A REGAL STAFF WITH A MYSTERIOUS CRYSTAL THAT CHANGES TO VARIOUS HUES ACCORDING TO HOW MUCH MAGIC IS ACCUMULATED. LOOT FROM THE 'QUEEN OF ANCIENT TIMES' RAID. RAISES POWER BY CONTINUOUSLY USING MAGIC OF THE SAME ATTRIBUTE.



▶ ITEM 2:

[PHIAL OF POLARIS]

A BEAUTIFULLY CRAFTED PHIAL CONTAINING SPARKLING BLUE WHIRLING COLD AIR INSIDE. AN ARCTIC CHILL RAGES OUT WHEN OPENED AND SLOWS DOWN ENEMIES. BECAUSE IT TAKES A FULL DAY FOR THE COLD AIR TO GATHER INSIDE, IT'S NECESSARY TO DETERMINE WHEN TO BEST USE IT.



▶ ITEM 3:

[DO YOUR BEST CARD]

SCRIBE'S PRODUCTION-CLASS ITEM MESSAGE CARD. WAS DISTRIBUTED TO D.O.D MEMBERS AS A PRIZE DURING THE SAME ERA. MISA HAS DRAWN A DEFORMED IMAGE OF RIEZE ON IT.



Name: Rieze

Level: 90

Race: Half-Alv

Class: Sorcerer

HP: 8758

MP: 13137Equipment

Pride of Queen

A regal staff with a mysterious crystal that changes to various hues according to how much magic is accumulated. Loot from the 'Queen of Ancient Times' raid. Raises power by continuously using magic of the same attribute.

Phial of Polaris

A beautifully crafted phial containing sparkling blue whirling cold air inside. An arctic chill rages out when opened and slows down enemies. Because it takes a full day for the cold air to gather inside, it's necessary to determine when to best use it.

Do Your Best Card

Scribe's Production-class item Message Card. Was distributed to D.D.D members as a prize during the game era. Misa has drawn a deformed image of Rieze on it.

Chapter 3: Fallen Guardian

Part 1

It was unofficial, but in Rod Lab, people of the same subclass researching the same topics would form groups known as divisions or departments.

For instance, chefs like Mikakage would experiment with new cooking techniques daily, testing the limits of this action known as cooking. But on top of clean and plentiful water, ingredients and fuel, they needed a kitchen, ovens, heaters, fridges, all sorts of knives, different containers, moulds and equipment like blenders.

In the end, the value of a guild lay in utilizing large facilities like this that were hard for a single Adventurer to own. The facilities belonged to the guild so they were not for their personal use, but being able to use such top class equipment by just paying a small membership fee was a steal. And recently, their membership fees were waived because of the profits they brought in with their collaboration with 8th District Shopping Center.

There were dozens of kitchens with varying sizes and facilities in Rod Lab, used by 70 odd members of the gourmet department. To coordinate timetabling for kitchens and booking of equipment, the members had to communicate with each other.

"Ellie~!"

The late afternoon showed a tint of orange as the sunlight hours before evening basked the room. A casual youth appeared.

The plant fairy Ellie was frightened by the sudden visitor, her tiny body jumping into the air. The visitor took the chance to hug Ellie.

Wearing a fancy 3 layer shirt, this Cleric with bad taste in fashion was Aomori. This useless Adventurer was a colleague of Mikakage and also a chef. He was another member of the gourmet department.

Ellie, who had a potato in each hand, was spooked, and started to struggle by waving her hands around.

"Aomori, don't bully Ellie."

"I'm not bullying her. Right, Ellie?"

With the height of a kindergarten child, the fairy wearing the same clothes as Mikakage continued to struggle. This little girl was scared of strangers; in Mikakage's eyes, Aomori was like the terrible uncle who wanted to cuddle his niece but ended up bullying her. Ellie's eyes, under the chef hat that was similar to Mikakage's, were starting to tear up.

"Aomori!"

Mikakage threatened Aomori, and with Aomori saying his usual phrase, "Don't call me Aomori, call me Blue forest," he let Ellie go.

Ellie ran off with the potatoes and hid behind Mikakage, hugging her legs.

"Anything to eat?"

Aomori pulled a chair over and sat down, asking the question that shouldn't come from a chef. Mikakage pointed calmly at the pot. Aomori made his way slowly over, making happy sounds of 'wah' as he filled his plates.

Mikakage ignored Aomori as she continued peeling potatoes with her knife. After peeling one, the cute Ellie would hand her another. The petite Ellie stood on her personal stool. The image of the top half of her body and wiggling ears showing on the kitchen table was very cute.

Ellie was a fairy summoned by the Druid Mikakage with unlimited summoning time. If Mikakage did not dispel her, Ellie would stay by her side forever. Mikakage treated her tiny familiar like a kid sister and didn't dispel her, spending her days eating and sleeping with her. The chef clothing and hat on Ellie were the same style as Mikakage's, made by the clothing department of Rod Lab on Mikakage's request.

Mikakage spent the chaotic time after the Catastrophe with her tiny familiars like Ellie. Her kid sister assistant Ellie, the goods ferrying helper Macanido and the lullaby singer Ochelsea. If they weren't with her, Mikakage would have definitely fallen into depression. Mikakage was glad that she was a Druid.

"Erm... " Aomori called out to Mikakage, but Mikakage only diverted the attention of her ears towards him.

"What dish is this?"

He was probably asking about what was in the pot.

(I remember it was...) Mikakage tried to recall the answer.

"Eagle beak beans with flute horn buffalo stew. Added salt, pepper, butter and several spices."

"I see. I don't understand."

Aomori replied honestly, Mikakage just shrugged.

It was useless for him to ask. Mikakage was not good at cooking after all.

Some may be surprised at her saying this despite having the subclass of Chef, but Mikakage saw herself as a confectioner, not a chef. She did know how to make a meal but she basically threw everything into a pot and heated it up. Pressure cookers were so wonderful, you just needed to add ingredients and spices and then warm it up. You could make something that could pass off as food. Mikakage thought this was a great invention and loved using it.

"Speaking of which... Cheese."

"Hmmm?"

Aomori who was eating the stew tilted his head. Mikakage was asking for cheese again, and he immediately said 'Ohh! I forgot. Yeah, it's done.' He took out something that looked like misshaped tofu from the ice bucket beside him.

Mikakage received it and sniffed it. It was cheese.

With this, the number of pastries she could make would increase. Cheese roll? Or basic cheese cakes? Or serve it with pudding? Since she was going to do it, Mikakage wanted to surprise everyone.

"Thanks."

"Yeah."

Aomori replied between sips of water. He was not a normal chef either.

He changed his subclass to Brewer, making all sorts of ingredients, a weirdo that didn't make food himself. But that was to be expected.

If you wanted to make food and serve customers, joining 8th District Shopping Center and opening a stall would be a better option. Or if you wanted to move towards mass production and grab a share of the market,

Oceanic Systems would suit you better by getting funding from smaller guilds. They were developing catering systems, so it was a great business opportunity.

This was Rod Lab, where weirdos working on new inventions congregated.

In a sense, Mikakage and Aomori were the same.

"Making something new again?"

"Yeah."

Mikakage carefully placed potatoes inside the oven and sprinkled sugar on it, answering half-heartedly. Compared to cakes made from flour, the foods made from fresh ingredients like potatoes were always different. Like the moisture and the sweetness, the impact of the ingredients had more variety. She needed to add sugar to make up for the lack of sweetness in the raw ingredients, so she had to be careful in her cooking.

"A door gift?"

"Yeah."

"Take me with you."

"No."

Mikakage rejected him immediately as she put in fresh margarine. Aomori had impure motives behind his request. After finding out about the 'all girl' tea parties, he had brought this up dozens of times. Aomori was... Speaking of which, most of the men didn't understand. Chatting idly was a very precious thing.

It was irreplaceable.

Mikakage realized several things after coming to this world.

One of which was how valuable her time with friends was. There were no televisions, cell phones, movies or manga here. All these forms of entertainment were gone. Describing them as entertainment seemed to imply that they were unnecessary, but Mikakage didn't think so. No, all the Adventurers probably thought that was so too.

When the Catastrophe first occurred, the city was lifeless. Even with an immortal body, just eating tasteless food slowly without energy could not

be described as living. Living should be a happy and beautiful thing, there was a need for things to soothe both your body and soul.

(Like cakes, or friends to share your cakes with.)

Thinking carefully, Mikakage felt that the time she had spent chatting with friends after school was the best time of her life.

Mikakage reminisced about her middle school days, going to a fast food restaurant and ordering a 100 yen milkshake after club activities. She would empty her brain and chat and laugh until the sky grew dark. Back then, she thought this was something that would always be there and such days would never end. After moving on to high school, she grew apart from these friends and went straight home after school. Although she spent her time on manga and games instead, Mikakage learned the importance of the warmth between people after coming to this world.

Mikakage was a bit introverted by nature, but she had Ellie now. Her tiny partner that was even more shy than Mikakage. When Mikakage was together with Ellie, she would become mysteriously motivated, thinking that she had to take the initiative to greet others for Ellie's sake. She wanted to protect Ellie from making a troubled expression, giving her the strength to keep calm before a world class beauty like Raynesia. But the truth behind her calmness was that she knew about the careless side of the princess.

The pastries Ellie liked were loved by everyone.

Making new pastries for her friends was the biggest joy for Mikakage and the focus of her daily life. Fortunately, she made enough money from selling pastries and handing in recipe reports to live comfortably. Because of this, Mikakage was living everyday meaningfully after the Catastrophe.

Although the new findings from the gourmet department made her uneasy, the results seemed to be bearing fruit. Even though they had to survey in lots of places, it was interesting once they got used to it.

"Really, is that gathering so important?"

Mikakage pondered about Aomori's bashful question. Of course it was important.

Making pastries.

Sharing them with everyone.

Chatting about all sorts of things.

There was nothing that was more important. Men always wanted some form of result, which was not good. Things needed to be done slowly, with adequate heat and timing.

Mikakage wore big oven mitts and took the freshly baked cream potatoes out of the oven, presenting it to Aomori for him to eat. This was a new experimental pastry. Aomori gasped happily, but this was just a test, not good enough for the tea party participants. It was a bit better than testing poison, so it was fine to give it to Aomori.

"Yeah, it is important. Very important. There is definitely nothing more important."

"Huh? More important than your relationship with me?"

"That sort of thing is worse than burnt jam."

Aomori became depressed. Mikakage ignored him and cleaned up the kitchen appliances.

Even if Aomori complained, he would still finish the potatoes, and the shy but caring Ellie would console him.

Part 2

Raynesia was surprised when she learned the young man was visiting.

Raynesia knew this important person, but she didn't expect him to visit her or anyone ever.

When aristocrats visited, they would provide notice several days or even months in advance. For better or worse, Raynesia and her staff had gotten used to unexpected guests after living in the Water Maple Consulate in Akiba for a while.

It was the same this time, Raynesia received the report after the visitor entered the drawing room.

With Elissa's help, Raynesia groomed her hair and changed her dress. The young man was from 'that side', but he was not a noble. More importantly, both of them were People of the Land living in Akiba, so there was no need to dress up too formally. Because of this Raynesia opted to wear a slender one piece dress with long sleeves.

The pink snowy dress was a gift from Maryele of Crescent Moon Alliance. It was less prominent among the clothes she received, and Raynesia liked this dress a lot.

Seeing Raynesia rush over, the guest stood up to receive her.

"You look as wonderful as ever, Lady Raynesia."

The youth bowed his head politely. His name was Kinjyou, the young leader of the Kunie clan operating in Akiba.

"Sorry for the wait."

Raynesia returned the greeting.

While waiting for Elissa to prepare the tea, there was an uncomfortable silence.

Raynesia didn't know this young man well. Rather, the only thing she knew was that he was the young leader of the Kunie clan. The Kunie clan had a unique place amongst the People of the Land, they were an influential force in Yamato.

Yamato was roughly split into 5 domains.

In the barren north was the Ezzo Empire; in the extreme south was the seafaring nation, the Ninetails Dominion; the fallen state that was overrun with monsters, the Furland Dukedom; the successor of the Westelande dynasty, Holy Empire Westelande; last of all was the League of Freedom Towns Eastal that included Maihama ruled by Raynesia's grandfather, situated in eastern Yamato.

The 5 domains shared a common currency. Full gold and its denominations of half gold and quarter gold, known collectively as gold. Not only Yamato, Raynesia had heard the other continents were all using the same currency.

The currency that had been in use since ancient times. The Kunie were the clan that controlled all the banks around the globe.

Inheriting several technologies of the ancient Alv, they carried out long distance trades without relying on the intercity transport gates. By applying this technology, the Kunie were able to operate banks around the world.

But they were not a banking clan.

Their duty was the management of the Alv's magic techniques.

Although they were best known for running the bank, the Kunie were also in charge of the maintenance of the magic barriers in the League of Freedom Cities Eastal. The 30 odd cities with magic barriers had ancient magic circles built underground to power the defenses of the city. It prevented any monsters from invading and also powered the mobile suits of the guards.

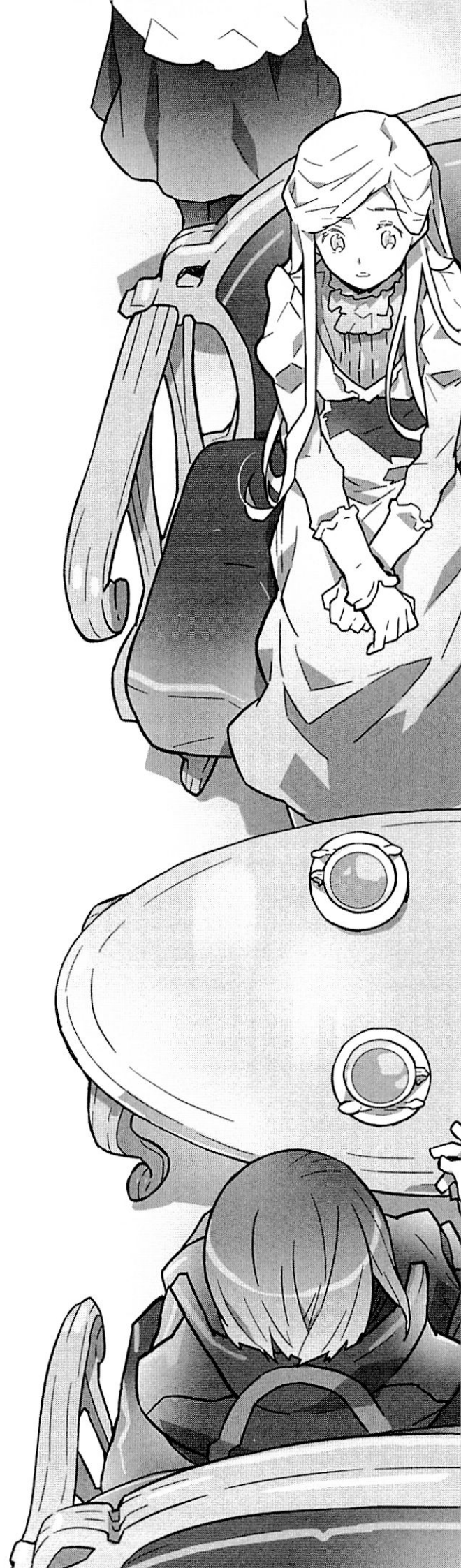
Apart from a few cities that were against the aristocratic system in the Holy Empire Westelande, all the cities in Yamato were supported by the Kunie clan.

With their heavy responsibilities, they were in a sense much more important than the noble families. When Raynesia was posted to Akiba, her grandfather told her everything he knew about the Kunie clan.

But the Kunie clan did not seek fame and power since ancient times. They simply did their assigned duties, and didn't bother with anything else other than finishing their task. That was the impression the aristocrats of Eastal had of them.

They were shrouded in mystery, a People of the Land clan that had been working hard to maintain the operation of this world. This was how normal People of the Land and Raynesia saw them.

"Please have some tea."



That was all she knew. Raynesia didn't know what to talk about, so she started by offering him tea. On the table was green tea she had purchased recently.

Kinjyou took a sip with his eyes squinting slightly.

Elissa had said that he was a young man. After meeting him face to face, that was the only way to describe him. But after observing this man with purple pupils, black hair and a high collar tuxedo, she was unable to tell his age.

He was definitely older than Raynesia, but how old was he compared to that monster warrior Krusty? The smooth contours of his face made him look young, but the veins on his hands seemed to be old. Raynesia had never met anyone whose age seemed so indefinite.

"I am sorry about this sudden intrusion. There is something of grave importance I needed to report to Lady Raynesia and apologize for."

Kinjyou put the cup back on the table with a serious face.

"May I ask what the issue is?"

"According to reports from the Guard room, a mobile suit has been stolen."

"Eh...?"

"The thief is a guard, one of the Kunie clan."

Raynesia didn't think of herself as a dull person, but she really didn't understand these word this time.

She could feel the blood draining from her body.

The revelation made her dizzy and and her vision turn black.

Mobile suits were one of the legacies of the Alv, a special suit of armor made to protect a specific zone. The biggest difference from normal armor was that it was powered by magic from an external source which enhanced the abilities of the user.

The combat power of the People of the Land was low in this world. Not just Adventurers, they couldn't even fend off mid level monsters. The People of the Land could only survive in this world because of several helpful elements.

One of them was the Ancients that were the heroes of the People of the Land, another was the Adventurers roaming the land erasing humanity's enemies. Third was the magic barrier that protected the major cities.

Lastly were the guards equipped with mobile suits.

People of the Land who were enhanced by the power of the mobile suits could outmatch an Adventurer. Although it was limited to within the city, they had the power to teleport and send criminals to prison. The guards used this ability to maintain order in the city.

But there was a limit to its usage. The mobile suit that drained a tremendous amount of magic just in standby mode could only be activated on the streets.

"That is correct. Mobile suits can only be used within the city limits. Without the magic supply from the giant magic circle built underground, the user won't be able to move a finger, a unique feature of this armor. As the magic supply wavelength is unique to each city, it will just be a heap of junk once you take it away from Akiba."

Kinjyou continued explaining to the stunned Raynesia.

"In summary, this matter is of grave importance. Although it becomes junk once you take it away from the city, it is still terribly powerful within the city limits."

The power of the mobile suit could be increased through adjustment. Its power was beyond level 100 on the streets of Akiba. This power was necessary to keep errant and violent Adventurers in line, so being more powerful than Adventurers was within expectation.

That Raynesia was able to take up the post in Akiba as a woman was all thanks to the mobile suits providing security for her. The official reason Raynesia came to Akiba was to take responsibility for going to the Adventurers for aid in the war of Sand Leaf without the League's permission. The reason why the defenseless Raynesia moved into the Adventurer city with only a small group was because her grandfather already took into account the existence of the guards.

But this powerful backing had leaked, which raised several other points.

"Could it be... the Murderer is..."

Facing the question of the pale Raynesia, Kinjyu nodded.

"Correct, the actions of this criminal are linked with the Kunie clan. It is a shame, but that is the truth."

This was like a nightmare to Raynesia.

The Kunie clan, or rather the guards going out of line was unacceptable. This was something that the People of the Land had never thought of for hundreds of years.

But this explained several mysteries.

That's why the guard system of Akiba was unable to detect the murder. The surveillance system was made against the Adventurers and the People of the Land, so it wouldn't detect anything from a fellow guard. The combat actions of a guard were not a crime, but an enforcement of security.

That meant the murder cases would never be detected.

The criminal wearing the mobile suit had power that outmatched the Adventurers. Raynesia who had no experience in battles didn't understand how much more powerful he was compared to Adventurers, but there had already been news of several victims falling to him.

Most importantly, the Kunie being involved in this raised two major concerns.

First, this clan penetrated deeply into their daily lives, an existence just like the air they breathed. Be it the security of the streets with the guards or the global banking network, these systems were rooted deeply in both People of the Land and Adventurer societies. Their safety and convenience formed the foundation of the societies in this world.

But wouldn't it be scary if this foundation were to crack? Without specialized education, Raynesia was unable to imagine how disastrous it would become, but she could feel the clouds of unease forming.

The other important point was more direct. Even though it was by the Kunie clan, the People of the Land killed an Adventurer.

Adventurers were totally different from People of the Land. Even though their appearance was similar, they were completely different organisms with drastic differences in potential. By going through battles repeatedly,

Adventurers could advance their strength by leaps and bounds. Just one high level Adventurer could rival a band of a hundred knights made up of People of the Land.

Right now, the Adventurers in Akiba were protecting Raynesia and supporting her. But weren't their actions influenced by the weakness of Raynesia and the others? Even if that were not everything, Raynesia knew it was a part of the reason.

If this reason was gone, the relationship between the Adventurers and the People of the Land might fall out of balance.

(Why is this happening...)

Raynesia's mind was full of remorse and sadness.

She couldn't describe it any other way. Why did this happen after she assumed the post here, was it because she made that speech? Why did this have to happen? The Kunie clan that had made no mistakes in hundreds of years just had to pick this moment when Raynesia was in Akiba to screw up, it was really incomprehensible.

"This happened because of our mismanagement, I offer my sincere apologies."

"Erm... for the Kunie clan... Is there something you can do about this?"

Raynesia probed hopefully.

Although she could sense it before probing, she still asked anyway.

"I am terribly sorry Lady Raynesia. The movements of the mobile suits will stop if we cut off the magic supply. But the defensive magic barrier in the city will also be lost. To reactivate it, it would take 10 years. That is all I have to say."

The magic circle barrier protecting Akiba from invading monsters that must not be deactivated.

The fact that this magic circle was supplying power to the Murderer hit Raynesia hard.

Part 3

Akatsuki was in the waiting room warming her hands with a tea cup while wearing a meek expression.

She was not doing it because it was cold or because there was nothing else to do.

How much of it was an accident and how much was this the schemes of the maid Elissa? With her keen hearing thanks to her Tracker subclass, Akatsuki was able to hear every word in the drawing room next door.

From the contents of their conversation, this was not something Akatsuki could settle alone. Only a major guild like West Wind Brigade or D.D.D could handle this. It might even require the strength of the Round Table Council. Without question, this was a major crisis for Akiba.

Akatsuki could not pretend she did not hear anything.



The princess that was as beautiful as the moon must be worrying about how to convey this to the Adventurers. Having heard about the Murderer before Raynesia made any moves had major repercussions.

So Akatsuki decided to meet the princess, but thinking carefully, that might be too rash. The reason probably lay in the sense of duty to her lord. Since Shiroe willed it, she had to see Raynesia's face at the very least. That was all. Right now, Akatsuki did not have any strength to meddle with the affairs of others.

She walked silently to the balcony from the waiting room. Her figure was just like a shadow with her low profile clothes. Leaping to the balcony of the meeting room 3 meters away was as easy as moving across a tatami for the superhuman Adventurers.

In the shade of the window frame with elaborate carvings, on the other side of the bubble like lace curtain was Raynesia. The young man she was talking to earlier probably left, leaving Raynesia alone to bury her face in a cushion.

(How strange,) Akatsuki thought absently.

Raynesia was always so gentle, bright, keeping her back straight, a beautiful young lady who made others envious. Her pretty silver hair, slender neck and proper manners that were always under control gave her an air different from Adventurers. Their difference was not because of Raynesia's beautiful silver locks and her slender neck, but because of her polite manners. Having the charm to convince any Adventurer, that was the type of girl Raynesia was.

But the Raynesia right now was leaning forward deflated, with her face buried in a cushion supported by her hands. It was not like Raynesia to act this way.

"I can't."

She heard these words through the glass.

The soft voice was like the chime of a bell, but her helplessness and troubles were obvious.

"I really can't."

Raynesia was shaken, her silver hair was shaking like a waterfall.

"... Why, why now... why me?"

Raynesia seemed to be getting smaller.

After a long sigh, Raynesia became a frail girl.

"Why can't things go right..."

Akatsuki nodded while standing on the veranda in the winter sun. She understood this feeling.

There were so many difficult things in this world, but the things you could do well were so limited. It made you remorseful and frustrated.

"Isn't there any other way? ... Can't they just close an eye? Can't... they just let me go?"

Akatsuki hoped so too.

Who didn't?

But it accomplished nothing.

Akatsuki thought everyone had been betrayed before. Not all of your wishes would come true. Something you thought was in your hands, something you achieved, something which you thought belonged only to you, would one day fade away and slip from your grasp.

Because she was too insignificant, she wondered sometimes whether wishing for something was wrong in the first place. Maybe the majority of this world consisted of bullied beings.

"What should I do?"

Raynesia who was forced into a corner asked herself, so Akatsuki replied.

"Discuss this with someone from the council?"

"Wouldn't this turn into a conflict with the Adventurers?"

"But the facts will be known sooner or later. But it is difficult to convey this tactfully."

Slipping in through the barely opened window, Akatsuki stood before Raynesia without disturbing the curtains.

She felt a sense of nostalgia. She had seen her lord assume the same position before. But it had been so long since that day. The one before her was not the black haired lord, but a silver haired princess.

"Guess I have to inform them..."

"I'm not sure myself."

"Why isn't the mind reading monster here right now... He always shows up when I don't want him to, but he's not here when I need him."

"Mr Krusty is heading towards the goblin's castle of 'Seven Falls'."

"I know. Even if you say that... Ah, that's not what I want to talk about."

"..."

"That's not what I meant!?" Raynesia sprang up and faced Akatsuki. The lips she was biting on were trembling, she tried to maintain her composure, but the corners of her eyes were turning red.

"Eh, ah, ermm."

She sat down properly in a hurry, straightening her back in front of the standing Akatsuki. Because Akatsuki was petite in size, their eyes were at about the same level if she sat up straight. Raynesia gazed downwards uncomfortably. Akatsuki felt sorry for startling the princess.

Akatsuki hadn't planned to eavesdrop or intrude like this.

"Eh, eh... so... did you hear everything..." Facing the probing eyes of Raynesia, Akatsuki nodded. Raynesia gave up and said with a voice growing softer "is that so."

Time passed gradually between the 2 dumbstruck ladies.

Akatsuki was out of ideas, so she took out the red bean bun she had purchased for lunch from her bag and gave it to Raynesia. The 2 girls sat side by side on the couch munching on the 2 halves of the bun in silence.

"The Murderer is a Person of the Land?"

Akatsuki asked and Raynesia answered Akatsuki's question slowly.

"Yeah. That's right... the Kunie clan who guards this city had a mobile suit stolen. Because this mobile suit is the equipment of the guards, it

possesses immense battle capabilities and won't alert the authorities when going into combat. I am... really sorry."

"Why?"

"Eh?"

"Why was it stolen? Who stole it?"

"The culprit is still unknown. Whether the mobile suit is being operated by the defector of the Kunie clan is uncertain. His motives and hiding place are also unknown."

"I think he is hiding in the sewers."

"Sewers?"

Akatsuki expressed her thoughts.

"From what I have heard, he won't hide outside Akiba. If that were the case, the only place that has not been searched and is inconspicuous will be the sewers."

According to Raynesia, the Murderer had obtained the strength of a guard.

Although Akatsuki was stunned for a moment after hearing this, she grasped several important points.

The combat prowess of the Murderer was probably over 100 and closer to level 110. The level 90 Adventurers wouldn't be able to match up to him.

At the same time, he couldn't leave Akiba since he was using the powers of the mobile suit. He would lose his power once he left the city. Considering all this, his hiding places were limited.

But capturing him would be next to impossible.

In order to suppress the criminals, the guards had the ability to teleport. It was a useful skill when punishing PK actions, but it was also the perfect escape mechanism in the hands of the Murderer.

He could escape safely even when surrounded by a raid group.

"Is that so..."

Akatsuki looked at the girl in front of her.

The highest noble in Yamato, the daughter of clan Corwen.

The legendary renowned beauty of Eastal.

The bridge between the People of the Land and Adventurers, the driving force behind the victorious Sand Leaf war.

The bewitching princess of the silver moon.

The girl in front of her was known by so many names, but looked so normal.

She munched on her red bean bun despite her gloomy expression, a normal girl you could find anywhere. Akatsuki felt that Raynesia looked at her in the same way.

"Troubled?"

"Very troubled."

The 2 of them chatted casually, filled with their personal issues. Akatsuki could see herself when she looked at this beautiful silver princess.

Akatsuki's lord instructed.

Protect the People of the Land princess Raynesia.

Akatsuki interpreted this as an escort mission. But she could feel that was not what Shiroe meant.

(What does my lord want to protect...)

If the objective was to protect the safety of the princess, was there a need to attend the tea parties? If she just wanted to protect herself, was there any meaning behind Raynesia hosting these parties? What was she missing? Did Maryele and Henrietta already know the true meaning behind this?

Akatsuki wanted to tell princess Raynesia 'it can't be helped'.

Too many unfortunate things were happening. It was too much for her to handle and still realize her wishes. All this could not be helped. Akatsuki lacked the capability to create miracles with her hands. Apart from 'it can't be helped', she didn't have any words to console Raynesia.

She could add another sentence 'you tried hard' to console Raynesia.

Akatsuki had seen her in action during the conference of the lords. She also heard Shiroe's high praise for the princess. She had been protecting her on the side all this while, that's why she could say 'you tried hard'.

But did she have the right to say this? As the daughter of aristocrats, the representative of the People of the Land. This girl who was shouldering a burden heavier than any of the 11 guild masters of the Round Table Council. Akatsuki wondered if she should say that.

After thinking this far, Akatsuki bore some respect for the silver haired girl in front of her. That's why she came here daily to protect her up close.

Even though she was searching madly for more powerful combat abilities, even if she found it hard to return to her own guild house, Akatsuki cared about Raynesia.

"I will go take a look."

Akatsuki stood up.

The opponent she was looking for was a Person of the Land. Since he had a unique teleporting device, there was another way to find him. He probably hid in the sewer during the day and watched the entire city by night... He would probably teleport to somewhere the Adventurers could not enter and observe them from the dark.

"Eh...?"

"I will accomplish my mission. Because I have seen how hard you tried."

Raynesia did not touch anything when she reached out her hand.

Akatsuki who had obtained a hint had moved out for the streets of Akiba from the open window.

Part 4

10 pairs of eyes stared at the flashes of silver.

The colliding blades left flashes of light like meteors, gone in the next instance.

They crossed each other's paths as if they were arranged beforehand, clashing into each other. The echoes sounded closer to crystals being cut instead of the noise of steel clashing on steel as they opposed each other.

Watched over by Nazuna and her comrades, Soujiro was duelling to the death with the Murderer.

Soujiro wielded his katana so smoothly it didn't give off any air of threat. But Nazuna knew that Soujiro's every strike brought unavoidable fear to his foe. It only looked gentle because of how gracefully he swung the blade. Soujiro could even perceive the evasion path of his opponent before swinging his katana, his every blow was deadly.

The Murderer used the strange gauntlets on his hands and feet to guard against Soujiro's attacks.

This was not normal swordsmanship. It was akin to the instinctive actions of a feral beast as he fought with a glee that came from killing other humans.

Before the sparks even faded, the Murderer counterattacked from his off balance position.

Unlike Soujiro, there were no techniques to his offense, just taking wild and powerful swings.

But because of his chaotic style, his attacks were fast and unpredictable.

Nazuna's comrade Kyoko fell under his blade before, while Nazuna was cradling the heavily injured Kawara.

"The director is amazing..."

The girl in Nazuna's arms muttered, and the members on standby behind Nazuna were probably saying the same thing.

The original plan was to surround the enemy with their raid group.

Enbart Nelles.

Level 94 Samurai.

This Murderer who exceeded Soujiro by one level was not an Adventurer in Nazuna's eyes. Calling him a Samurai was ridiculous.

Nazuna had always watched over the growth of Soujiro the Samurai. The Samurai in Elder Tales could indeed learn a huge variety of skills. Although some were just upgrades of skills learned at lower levels, there were still 40 unique types to master. Although a player wouldn't be able to learn all

the available skills, the techniques used by Soujirou and the Murderer were obviously different.

That was not a warrior. His fighting style was fundamentally different from an Adventurer.

It started off with a party battle.

One of the scouting parties of West Wind Brigade encountered the Murderer, but he slipped away. Soujirou's party standing by in their base moved out and cornered the Murderer in this narrow alley with a party.

But the plan to surround the Murderer failed.

In this alley situated between 2 abandoned buildings, there was no way to fight as a party. Except Soujirou, no other person could stand up to the unorthodox swordsmanship of the Murderer.

The off tank Kawara took several hits and was badly hurt. Nazuna and the other mage were also hurt. If Soujirou didn't charge in to pressure the Murderer, some of them would have been sent to the cathedral.

Nazuna was thankful.

She wasn't thankful because Soujirou saved her.

She thought it was fortunate that no woman had fallen in front of Soujirou.

If sound could hurt people, the battle would have been surrounded by piles of bodies. The winter breeze in the evening was cold enough to freeze your skin off. The Murderer's sword cut through the air towards Soujirou.

In the air that was so cold that white fog formed even if you held your breath, Soujirou parried the blow.

This was Soujirou's Overskill, Clairvoyance.

Nazuna didn't understand it fully, but it seemed to be a defensive Overskill. Soujirou described it as following the route in the air. Soujirou learned a new skill and was fending off the attack of the Murderer thanks to that.

Soujirou was having a hard time.

The normal Soujirou wouldn't block attacks, but dodge them and parry them.

Since Soujirou couldn't do that, it meant the Murderer's attacks were fast and sharp.

One such unavoidable blow came, slicing off the shoulder guard of Soujirou's warring era Samurai armor.

The other comrades didn't understand, but Nazuna was biting her lips.

That attack broke through the protective barrier Nazuna cast on Soujirou. Protective barrier could be cast before battle, a spell that absorbed damage and prevented HP from taking a hit. It was invisible bonus HP. The water like effect of the barrier shattered. Although everyone could see this happen, only the caster Nazuna herself understood how much damage was negated.

Nazuna's Holy Barrier was equivalent to 20% of Soujirou's HP. This meant that Soujirou would have lost 1/5 of his HP without the barrier. Seeing this power that rivalled a major raid boss, Nazuna was burning with worry. Soujirou wouldn't be able to take many of these attacks.

She was already chanting in preparation of casting Holy Barrier again, but Holy Barrier was not a skill she could use consecutively. Using a combination of heals and barriers to protect her friends from harm was Nazuna the Kannagi's way of fighting.

Casting protective barriers repeatedly would drain a lot of MP which would put them at an disadvantage. But if she didn't do this, she would feel like she was treading on a wire. If she used defensive magic and was noticed by the Murderer, she might be targeted next.

But she couldn't protect or heal Soujirou if she ran away.

She could only keep watching the battle and she understood her capability. She had to keep on casting barriers even though they were as weak as paper.

(What is with this guy. This is a huge gamble.)

She could understand some things because she was a Kannagi.

Because the guild West Wind Brigade was not big in scale, but still managed to be one of the leading guilds in the server for raids. As the healer of such a guild, she understood something.

She knew the battle was not going well.

They were still hanging on because the tank was Soujirou. If not for Soujirou, Nazuna was sure they would have been massacred.

But even Soujirou could not handle all the blows.

In a major raid, it was impossible to fend off all the attacks of giant dragons or titans. For major raids they would need 1 tank supported by 3-10 healers to hold the line, leaving the attackers to deal damage.

But they were lacking in both attackers and healers right now. Most of the tactics for major raids were not applicable for such a narrow alley.

Nazuna and the others would have nothing to fear if the opponent were an Adventurer or a normal monster. But this Murderer was more powerful than they had imagined.

And also-

"Ku!!!"

Soujirou's attack was dodged.

The Murderer slipped to Soujirou's right, his figure like an insect as he slashed at Soujirou's thigh. Although Soujirou evaded with a leap, his movements were no longer graceful like a dance. He was at his limits.

Consecutive attacks, strikes that disrupted his balance, carefully planned blows, the Murderer was able to evade all this with his weird movements. And he was keeping this up.

He burrowed through Soujirou's attack and got behind Soujirou.

If they could land a hit, no matter how good their foe was, he couldn't be a major raid monster. But they just couldn't hit him. If this went on, even if Soujirou could keep on tanking, the front line would still fall when Nazuna's MP was exhausted.

And also...

(If we are still here, Soujirou won't be able to withdraw.)

Nazuna concluded.

"... Mr Soujirou."

"Director."

"Oh no, I can't watch."

Nazuna heard the pained cries of her comrades. Nazuna's duty was to heal their wounds, but she couldn't afford to right now. Helping them would drain whatever meagre MP she had left.

Her panicking heart started searching for another way to withdraw.

Asking Soujirou to go first was impossible. There was no way he would leave his friends behind. And if Soujirou who was engaging the Murderer were to run, that would invite the Murderer to cut him down from the back.

Nazuna couldn't withdraw first for the same reasons. If she left, the best scenario was her barrier lapsing after 30 seconds of effective time. Once the barrier was gone, Soujirou would take HP damage. To keep Soujirou alive so they wouldn't be hunted by the Murderer, Nazuna couldn't leave.

What about the other girls?

Karawa, Olive and the others could go first, that was the correct way.

But that required a distraction. If the girls were to take off all of the sudden, the Murderer might switch his target and ravage the girls. It was up to Soujirou to protect the girls, but it was hard to say whether he could manage. That was how good the Murderer was.

She prayed for an opportunity. Time passed as she thought and the night grew dim. The hellfire emitted by the Murderer's blade made the shadows sway as the evening went on.

Soujirou's sword seemed more hesitant. The battle was at an impasse. Even Soujirou might fall if he had any mental lapses.

And then. The black swallow descended.

Part 5

Running on the branches of the trees growing around the guild building, she leaped off at the tip of the branch.

The thinner branches were better. Although the thicker ones felt safer, they were not suitable for her to 'fly'.

Akatsuki repeated this action as she flew around Akiba.

Just like the roads on the ground, there was also a path in the sky. Convenient footholds like branches or rooftops, balconies or broken signboards. From the ruins to the ancient trees all over the city, there was a path for people to travel in the sky.

She wondered when she started using these routes subconsciously.

This was not an option in the game world.

She couldn't do this when the Round Table Council was just founded. She started doing this without much thought after returning from Sand Leaf. Although she didn't remember when she learned this, now she knew that such convenient routes in Akiba existed. Akatsuki discovered that she was subconsciously observing the air currents, positions of the buildings, walls and trees.

Her hair swayed in the wind.

If her hair felt heavy, it meant the air was getting humid and it was going to rain.

If she felt her body being pulled, that meant the wind was picking up and some paths were inaccessible.

Akatsuki was able to grasp all these details, mastering amazing skills that set her apart from other Adventurers traveling in the sky.

She was just moving as usual, but her limbs were more nimble and her body was warming up.

The instant when she put her weight on a branch and she calculated her next trajectory, she was not just aware of her body movements, but the wind as well. She had done this dozens of times, but now it took only half the strength as usual to travel from branch to branch, and the momentum set her up for the subsequent jumps too. When did she notice such details?

Her short conversation with Raynesia looped in her head.

She was not used to thinking about the problems of others and was unable to summarize her thoughts well. Raynesia's image, Raynesia's words, her own thoughts, her own reply. These things kept forming and disappearing like bubbles from within Akatsuki.

It disappeared before becoming words, so Akatsuki was also not sure what was motivating her.

Raynesia was working hard.

Only these words stayed in her chest.

She thought it was time to reward Raynesia's efforts.

She glanced at the setting sun to the west and perked up her ears, feeling her consciousness expand outwards. The detection skill she was always using captured the conversations spoken in the streets of Akiba.

'Let's hurry back to the guild and make onion soup.'

'Where should we hunt tomorrow?'

'Let's have dinner somewhere alright? It's... it's my treat!'

'I'm looking for a new business venture.'

'Our tactician is really strict.'

'Would you please go on a date with me?'

'An Adventurer can eat twice my portion. No, 3 times.'

These were all unimportant casual chatter and forgettable conversations. But they sounded so clear to Akatsuki today.

These were probably personal secrets.

After finishing their work for the day, they would spend the evening with their loved ones. Or they would wonder what tomorrow would bring, these were the little wishes everyone thought of. Although the words she overheard were insignificant, they were still secret private affairs.

Akatsuki was not certain, but these were probably important words for the individual. Akatsuki understood its importance today.

She was not sure what it was, but Akatsuki stumbled on something important.

Because she was thinking about these things, she had already begun rushing towards the battle zone when she discovered the battle.

Her ears picked up faint sounds of swords clashing, and she changed her route, taking 2 minutes to reach the scene of battle. The moment she detected the fight from a 15 story high building, she charged into the gap between the 2 buildings immediately.

She kicked off the walls of the building to accelerate her free fall.

She gripped the hilt of the Kodachi strapped behind her waist and held her breath as she struck like an ice pick.

As she went through the thin layer of air made by magical equipment, Akatsuki finally grasped the situation.

A party was fighting with the black Murderer. The tank was a Samurai with only one healer still in the fight. The party was falling apart.

The tank was the guild master of West Wind Brigade Soujirou, one of the 11 guilds that formed the Round Table Council.

What Akatsuki was doing was known as 'kill stealing' in MMORPGs. When a party was fighting another opponent, an Adventurer outside the party joined the fray without permission. Because doing this was akin to robbing the EXP and loots of others, it was not only bad manners but shameful.

And the party in question right now was one of the top guilds in Akiba right now. If it were the usual socially awkward Akatsuki, she would definitely be troubled and find it hard to approach them.

But it was different now.

Her mind was full of things that had happened this morning.

Because all sorts of things happened in the morning, she couldn't take in any more information into her brain.

With her feverish mental state, Akatsuki could see the world dozens of times clearer than usual and jumped.

She slashed horizontally from the right, performing Accel Fang.

It didn't hit. She already knew. She kicked off the wall and did a Viper Slash in mid-air.

After being parried, she somersaulted and used Killing Assault.

Akatsuki understood from the first attack that the Murderer was very powerful, that she couldn't defeat him.

But she wouldn't stop either.

Hoping to get a tiny hint from the opponent, she used Venom Strike.

She retreated to avoid the enemy's sword, but it wasn't enough. She forcefully performed Gust Step to move behind the opponent. But it was no good. Even though the enemy's glowing green sword threatened to break through Akatsuki's defense with its freezing slashes, Akatsuki continued to advance calmly. She used Accel Fang even though she felt the fringe on her right hair being cut off.

Too shallow. Again! She deftly adjusted her movements and used Accel Fang.

Quicker, faster, swifter.

Akatsuki noticed a watery barrier around her body.

This was the protective spell of a Kannagi. She could tell it was of a higher caliber than Minori's. This should be the support of the healer she saw.

But Akatsuki understood that this was meaningless insurance. The Murderer was still waving his sword at the Samurai in front of him. That was why he was not counterattacking Akatsuki as much, that was why she was still alive. If it were one on one, Akatsuki would be dead by now.

It was hard to stomach, but the young man, wearing a ponytail despite being a man, was one of the top ranked vanguards in the server. Soujirou Seta, guild master of West Wind Brigade. Akatsuki couldn't match up to him in either fame or achievement. But even the renowned Soujirou couldn't suppress this dark Murderer.

"Run!" yelled Akatsuki.

She could tell Soujirou's response from the corners of his lips rising. His strong eyes looked towards Akatsuki. He might look younger than Akatsuki, but Akatsuki instinctively knew she wouldn't want to see his intimidating side. Regardless, Akatsuki was still fighting like a mini hurricane.

"Why?"

Soujirou asked so naturally that Akatsuki was dumbstruck.

She just yelled on reflex. Akatsuki herself didn't even know why she did that. The monstrous Person of the Land outmatched Akatsuki by far.

This was natural. Not only was his level higher than the Adventurers', his abilities were boosted by the mobile suit armor. If you looked closely, the hands and feet of the Murderer were bulking up because he put on the mobile suit forcibly. The light glowing from his armor proved he was drawing magic from somewhere, protecting him from harm with a barrier.

There was no way Akatsuki could win. Soujirou probably couldn't either. Defeating this monster in such a narrow alley was impossible. They would need a large number of Adventurers to subdue him. But why did she shout out loud? Was she hoping to lure the Murderer away to help Soujirou?

Behind Akatsuki's thoughts which were full of turmoil, she could see the image of Shiroe looking towards the sky with a sigh.

"Why?"

"Because defeating him and solving the problem are not the same thing."

The alien took a swing at Soujirou, and Akatsuki attacked with all her might.

Assassinate. Although it caused over 10,000 points of damage, she could only slightly deflect the dark, heavy and huge gauntlets of the Murderer.

"That's why you should run!"

"I cannot agree to this."

Facing another warning, Soujirou deepened his smile as he slashed his sword down.

The Murderer kicked out from an uncanny angle, but Soujirou dodged and it brushed the fringe on the right of his face. After losing ground just like Akatsuki, Soujirou advanced and slashed his sword upwards, making a cross with his previous attack.

Soujirou was very strong. Probably several times more than Akatsuki.

She could tell from Soujirou's short exchange of blows.

That's why Soujirou should understand that he couldn't cut down this monster in a place like this. Why didn't he run? Akatsuki thought he was a stubborn man. Speaking of which, all the men in this world were stubborn. Tohya and Rundelhaus in the junior team were very stubborn. Instead of being stubborn, Naotsugu was just too dumb to change his bad habits. Master Nyanta was more stubborn than he looked. Putting cucumbers in the salad was the best evidence. The only one not stubborn was her lord Shiroe who listened to her words patiently.

"Left!"

Akatsuki stopped abruptly as a violent piece of metal brushed before her nose.

The blow she avoided barely was dodged by Soujirou who was looking at Akatsuki calmly.

Watching all this, Akatsuki felt a sense of longing and mystery.

Soujirou smiled as he faced the Murderer and Akatsuki, which intimidated Akatsuki.

The normal Akatsuki would have sensed the overwhelming pressure that told her to run.

But she didn't feel it now.

Akatsuki felt there was something important which she didn't quite understand here. Soujirou was not intimidating Akatsuki. She felt that he was trying to convey something.

Although Akatsuki felt sorry for not understanding the things Soujirou was trying to tell her, she knew it was something very important.

"Miss Nazuna. Please head back first."

"... I understand. I will wait for you in the guild hall."

Akatsuki finally understood that Soujirou was going to continue this losing fight with the Murderer to protect the young girls who were exhausted. As a last act of support, barriers were casted on Akatsuki and Soujirou, who attacked fiercely to cover Nazuna's retreat.

Both the graceful continuous attacks of Soujirou and the skills used by Akatsuki had no effect on the Murderer. Dozens of attacks fell in

succession. Being able to battle the Murderer for so long with just 2 people felt different from the murder cases so far, but Akatsuki couldn't spare any thoughts for this.

Even with the wide gap in their strengths, she still swung her blade desperately.

Akatsuki felt that even if she gave her all here, she still couldn't change the cheap life of Adventurers who could respawn in the cathedral. She had been insignificant, slow and weak after all.

But Akatsuki felt that Raynesia was working hard.

Before she knew it, the barrier had already been exhausted. The chill she felt didn't seem to be from the winter breeze, but from the wide area attack from the Murderer in front of her. Soujirou, who was tanking the attacks, had less than half his HP left. The time they had left was dwindling.

"Alright then, I should offer a gift to my juniors."

Soujirou spoke some unfathomable words and changed his stance.

In the eyes of the Kendo girl Akatsuki, it was a beautiful middle guard stance... in Kendo terms, this was the stance of straight eyes.^[6]

"But I don't have anything impressive to say."

In front of the stunned Akatsuki, Soujirou swung his sword smoothly. A simple, nondescript strike. This was followed by the Murderer's counter which missed.

"Look closely, listen carefully."

This time, it was a bone breaking attack from the Murderer. It collided with the strike Soujirou made at the same time. They separated in the air filled with Soujirou's frozen blood, and clashed again.

"To become stronger, you need to keep thinking. Don't give up, keep training."

Akatsuki joined the fray, swinging her Kodachi with all she had.

Such an important thing was damaged because Akatsuki didn't understand its seriousness and crumbled.

That wouldn't do. Her heart was full of sadness.

"... This is not really an explanation, but that is the truth behind all Overskills."

The Murderer spun with his waist as the focal point, turning into a small scale typhoon of destruction.

Not yet. Akatsuki began to think. She touched something, but didn't understand it.

She needed to want it more. This was the feeling of regret that Akatsuki didn't feel often.

Feeling that it was such a pity to lose something.

But the blade slashed down with a roar, threatened to break this feeling of Akatsuki's into pieces.

Her wish for this thing she could barely touch with her fingertips was shattered by this blow. Akatsuki and Soujirou 'died' bearing unimaginable pain.

Part 6

Not every tea party turned into a dress up exhibition.

The weather this morning was bad. Raynesia's drawing room was all quiet.

The atmosphere of the tea party was determined by the participants. When Maryele was around, the atmosphere was more lively and festive. When only Henrietta was around, it became a pure chatting session.

It was elegant and peaceful when Rieze was around.

Members from Crescent Moon Alliance and The Roderick Firm were not coming today. Rieze informed the puzzled Raynesia. She welcomed the tactician trainer and had lunch together with her, enjoying the green tea poured from a giant tea pot.

Outside the window were overcast clouds on the verge of crying.

The blonde Adventurer sitting opposite her on the small sofa set looked out the window.

The two of them couldn't even hold a proper conversation.

Raynesia was not too concerned about this. She had been worried in the beginning and tried to make small talk. But the young girl had told Raynesia there was no need to be concerned, so Raynesia didn't try to force a conversation.

But they were not on bad terms or had nothing to talk about. If there was a topic, they could still chat about it, that was the relationship between the 2 young girls Raynesia and Rieze.

Raynesia was not in the mood to talk today anyway.

The People of the Land guardian whose purpose was to uphold the law in Akiba was attacking Adventurers. There had been several victims. Raynesia felt hot and bothered just thinking about her petite friend who left for the streets after saying unfathomable words.

Why was the situation like this? Why me? These questions circled in her head endlessly.

Her melancholy self was like the overcast sky as she frowned.

"The Tokyo here is cold, the winter is probably going to be freezing."

"Tokyo...?"

Rieze's sudden comment pulled Raynesia back to reality.

This should be the language of the ancient Alv, meaning 'Paradise of the East'. In the Castle Cinderella Raynesia grew up in, the words Tokyo could be seen on ancient metal signs.

"Ah, that, it's a term Adventurers use. It refers to the region around Maihama, Akiba and Shibuya."

Raynesia nodded at this explanation.

This fitted with Raynesia's shallow knowledge of the world.

"Does Lady Rieze hail from a place warmer than Tokyo?"

"Although it is warmer, it is still in Tokyo... Yeah, it is warmer. The winter is not as cold. We are afraid of the cold so we would wear thick layers of clothes and just stay indoors."

(... Afraid of the cold? Stay indoors?)

She didn't understand the words of the Adventurers.

The perplexed Raynesia met her eyes with Rieze's.

Rieze quietly placed her cup back on the saucer and looked at Raynesia for a moment. Raynesia was not sure how to face this gaze as she saw Rieze smile warmly and gently for the very first time.

"My place of birth is a small city in Tokyo."

"It's not in Akiba?"

"No. It's a city called Kiyose. Using the terms here... it's near Nobidome District. A place that seems to have things, but is actually insignificant."

"But..."

In Raynesia's memory, Nobidome District was a nest of aquatic monsters. There were no towns, not even a village there.

Raynesia was stunned at how surprised she was.

"Isn't Lady Rieze a noble?"

She asked because she had always assumed Rieze was an aristocrat or had come from a powerful clan. All Adventurers had gone through education beyond normal peasants. Among them, Rieze and Henrietta showed exceptional grace and dignity befitting a noble when conversing with others. This was not superficial courtesy. People who were raised and pampered as they grew up were all nobles in Raynesia's eyes.

It didn't really matter whether they were aristocrats. Raynesia pondered why she was stunned by this. She had never discriminated against others because they were peasants or Adventurers. She searched for an answer in her heart and got an answer.

"Yes, that is correct. I was born and raised in a small normal family, educated in a normal school."

"..."

"There should be things like a school here, right? It's a place where the children are gathered to be educated. All children have to go through compulsory education in the place I was from."

She really didn't know anything about Rieze.

She didn't know anything about Akatsuki, Henrietta, Maryele, Serara, Nazuna, Mikakage, or Ranya.

Krusty too.

She really didn't know anything about Adventurers.

She was reminded time and again of her lack of knowledge and she became ashamed of her ignorance.

"Now that you mentioned it... When I was little, I was really naughty. Those kids shows... they don't have that here, so I should say children's tales. I liked the contents of fairy tales. Because of my interest, I spent a lot time with the boys. But I stopped doing that when I was 10... I wanted to be a pure maiden, but failed and was teased. I liked studying and was good at it. I was rewarded if I did well so I got even better. But when being good at studies became the norm, I didn't get praised anymore..."

"Ah..."

Raynesia knew how that felt.

She was good at behaving well and smiling and she didn't feel uncomfortable sitting properly after having grown up. She only did this because of the praises. Raynesia loved her parents, grandparents and all her family.

But it had become second nature to her now, it was as if she forgot how to behave any differently. In the beginning, she just wanted to make the people she loved smile, she wanted them to be happy.

"I was an honor student in school. Probably because I am good at handling adults and studying. It's not something I worked hard to learn, but my natural talent. My town has several large hospitals and many elderly people. So compared to the gazes of other kids, I was more concerned with the gazes of the adults. In that sense, I was happy to have joined D.D.D. Because there are people who can crush the pretentious me, and people who tell me there is no need to spend my whole life brooding over this."

"Erm..."

Raynesia interrupted with a strong voice.

This was something she shouldn't hear.

She was not qualified to hear this.

Raynesia had always thought of Rieze as a strong woman, a noble and a natural Adventurer. Raynesia felt ashamed to have thought this way. In the end, she did not understand Rieze as an individual.

When she realized this, she truly understood how small the world she knew was.

She was not ignorant of the world because she was educated as a princess of Maihama. Her view of the world was narrow because she ignored the things right in front of her.

Raynesia had always worked hard.

She understood what this sentence meant now.

Didn't it imply 'I have been watching?'

To not even grasp this, Raynesia really was naive.

"I was born in Maihama. As a princess, I was raised by my nanny... I am not familiar with the games others play. I felt fortunate to have a happy and prosperous life. To have pretty clothes and plenty of food, my life was never in danger either."

Raynesia started the topic with a soft voice.

"Academic-wise, I had several teachers in the castle. It might be an elite education in the eyes of People of the Land, but it's nothing to be proud of compared to lady Rieze and the others."

Raynesia was not sure what to say as she rumbled on.

She was doing this ritual of sharing her story like Rieze did.

"I was probably after the compliments of my clan so I hid my true self away. Actually... I am afraid of troublesome things. I want to sleep lazily until noon and bask in the sun leisurely. I can't follow conversations that are too deep. I will even yawn with my mouth closed sometimes when I am bored."

To confess all this to the thoughtful Rieze required a lot of courage.

But Raynesia didn't plan to stop talking even after seeing Rieze's reaction. That swallow like girl had probably flown far away.

"I came to this city because I thought I would be able to avoid all these troublesome formalities. I am not proficient in negotiations and taking responsibilities even now. I feel like crying when faced with things I don't understand. I think I'm just suitable to live my life eating rice balls and dazing away. But, that is not what I am... meaning because I am a princess... I can't do all that. Although I really don't know if this is true."

Raynesia hated herself for not being able to express herself properly.

Krusty was probably able to read her mind.

But that wouldn't do.

If she didn't do it right, Raynesia would not have any bonds linking her to this blonde lady or the swallow-like girl.

She could hear Elissa's quiet chuckle in her heart. Her temper rose for a moment and she blurted out crude words that were unlike her.

"Maybe, there are important things somewhere, because they are important, so I want to hold onto them. That's why I think I have to act like a princess... But my strength alone is not enough, that's why..."

"Yeah."

"I want to express myself properly to lady Rieze. Not only lady Rieze, but also lady Akatsuki and lady Maryele too. Or else, I won't have the right to be close to lady Rieze or live in Akiba... Even my arrogant thoughts of protecting everyone will be lost."

"Express yourself properly?"

Rieze laughed at these words. She calmly fulfilled Raynesia's wishes while hiding her embarrassed tones.

"Well, these things are embarrassing to say even when you are in high school. This is not something I can say so directly... This is my first advice to you. Wanting to 'express yourself' is too hard to understand. Raynesia, even though I am an Adventurer, I hope we can be friends."

The unworldly princess was gifted with an important thing in an unexpected place.

CHAPTER.



MARE TRANQUILLITATIS

[光 の 渚]

▶ NAME: MIKAKAGE

▶ LEVEL: 78

▶ RACE: HUMAN

▶ CLASS: DRUID

▶ HP: 7502

▶ MP: 7363

▶ ITEM 1:

[POT HOLDERS OF SALAMANDER]

COOKING MITTENS MADE OF MANY SALAMANDER SCALES USED FOR PRODUCTION-CLASS DISHES. RAISES SUCCESS RATE OF COOKING WITH A POT AND INCREASES THE OUTCOME QUALITY. HAS RESISTANCE TO FLAME AND BAD STATUS* THAT ARE RELATED TO IT. OFTEN USED IN CUISINE BATTLES.



▶ ITEM 2:

[COOKWARE ARRANGEMENTS OF VERDUN]

MAGIC COOKING KNIFE FOUND IN A CERTAIN DUNGEON. ALSO ACTS AS AN OUTSTANDING FOOD PROCESSOR DUE TO FOUR ROTATING BLADES OF WIND THAT APPEAR AT THE TIP WHEN IN USE. IT CAN STIR, SHRED, GRATE AND WHISK.



▶ ITEM 3:

[ANGEL MACAROON]

A BERET THAT LOOKS LIKE A MACAROON. REWARD FROM THE QUEST 'DREAM-COLORED PASTISIPRE' INVOLVING DELIVERY OF A LARGE AMOUNT OF CONFECTIONS. IT GIVES A QUALITY BONUS WHEN PRODUCING CONFECTIONERY. FAVORITE EQUIPMENT. TO THE POINT WHERE A REPLICIA ITEM WAS CREATED FOR THE ASSISTANT ALRAINE TO WEAR.



Name: Mikakage

Level: 78

Race: Human

Class: Druid

HP: 7502

MP: 7363

Equipment

Pot Holders of Salamander

Cooking mittens made of many Salamander scales used for Production-class dishes. Raises success rate of cooking with a pot and increases the outcome quality. Has resistance to flame and bad statuses that are related to it, often used in cuisine battles.

Cookware Arrangements of Verdun

Magic cooking knife found in a certain dungeon. Also acts as an outstanding food processor due to four rotating blades of wind that appear at the tip when in use; it can stir, shred, grate and whisk.

Angel Macaroon

A beret that looks like a macaroon. Reward from the quest 'Dream-Colored Pâtissière' involving delivery of a large amount of confections, it gives a quality bonus when producing confectionery. Favorite equipment, to the point where a replica item was created for the assistant Alraune to wear.

Chapter 4: Mare Tranquillitatis

Part 1

The lines started to move as if they were shoved from behind.

Akatsuki lost track of her thoughts as she was pushed along with the moving crowd. The petite Akatsuki walked briskly along the giant intersection in a gloomy mood.

There were tall black shadowy figures all around her moving with the flow. She heard a car horn from nearby, probably a horn of frustration in a traffic jam. No one seemed to mind the sharp metallic noise.

Akatsuki wondered if she was the only one who was intimidated by this sound. Akatsuki thought that it would be nice if someone did something about this, but that had never happened before. The human wall moving around her was intimidating. Salarymen, office ladies and students. People of all ages and occupations were moving along mechanically.

Some of them were speaking loudly. They chatted with a cell phone on their faces, talking about their business. The sound of them lecturing their subordinates made Akatsuki flinch. There were also sweet voices of people agreeing to go on a date. Akatsuki knew the lady who was speaking honeyed words into her phone was not even smiling.

She just knew. She couldn't see the expression of the people around her. In this chaotic flow of people, Akatsuki couldn't make out the faces of anyone. There was not enough space and she couldn't tell even if she lifted her head.

She was hurried along, pushed by the crowd. She moved along bearing a frightened, frustrated and gloomy mood.

The streets were bustling with noise. She could hear the siren of an emergency vehicle in the distance, the horns of cars and the exhaust pipes that sounded like angry beasts. People talking on their cell phones formed an unending chorus of sound. The neon lights and the music playing to different beats merged together and the human traffic was just like a weird tasting pizza sauce.

Akatsuki walked on with her head down, unable to understand the content of the music and conversations in the air. It was a mixture pressuring her ears, she could catch bits of conversations, but it was washed away by the

torrent of information. That's right, this was a violent flood. Akatsuki did not drown because she knew how to shut off her mouth, ears and eyes. But she was still being washed away with the muddy flow like the others who were drowning.

The torrent of humans forced Akatsuki to climb the slope along the railings below the building. Where were all these people going? This place full of buildings made from concrete and glass went high up into the heavens, and the people went in and out of these buildings. Just like a giant alien swallowing and vomiting the torrent of people, the buildings stood tall in the streets. Akatsuki and the crowds were moving in order for the buildings to devour them, and exited just to be eaten by another building.

An evergreen tree planted here was covered by brown dust. It seemed to be saying 'this building is owned by an environmentally friendly organization', and planting this tree was just a decorative alibi of their efforts. Although Akatsuki wouldn't fall and get trampled on in the streets, she still had to endure the crowd pushing her along 8760 hours a year, tormenting her beyond salvation. Akatsuki merely glanced at the tree before moving on. She was moving as fast as the black imposing crowd around her, following the pace of everyone living in the city in order to survive. You would fall out from society if you disrupted the pace.

The asphalt went on endlessly in Akatsuki's eyes. In the view of Akatsuki who was keeping her head down, the asphalt surface which suffered the blows of all kinds of shoes was the main character. The rain last night should have washed it clean, but the tired road was full of disposable chopsticks, unknown posters, plastic bags, silver wrappings and key chains that were bloated with muddy water. These should be things she saw for the first time, Akatsuki couldn't confirm before the crowd trampled on them. But there was one item that kept appearing on the road.

This plastic bag used to hold merchandise purchased from the shops, but it had lost its purpose and was merely trash now. This piece of garbage that was trampled by the crowd was indistinguishable from another tattered plastic bag that appeared 5 minutes later. Everyone would just see it as trash, including Akatsuki.

The time flew by in a rush, but seemed as slow as a snail too. The burst of advertisement music like a sudden storm sliced away at Akatsuki's time, controlling Akatsuki's life with its rhythm. But she was not so busy that she couldn't think about things. The time that was being cut into smaller

portions left no space for reading or playing, so it was spent on accomplishing small things.

For the people around her the time was used to talk loudly on their cellphones, or waste money on their smartphone games lethargically. Akatsuki who was not interested in these actions reflected on herself in the short amount of time she had, enduring wasting her time like this. Her angry emotions froze over time and turned into self-loathing. Living her life after dividing her time into the smallest denomination was not living life like a human. Akatsuki felt she was no different from livestock. The proof was that she lacked the means to escape from this place.

The crowd stopped as one, they reached a traffic light. When all the lights blinked red several times, it meant they could cross either normally or diagonally. The herd of cars screeched past Akatsuki as if they were being hunted. Akatsuki knew the next traffic light was 50m away in the inner city. Even if the light was green, they would still need to stop at the next junction. The driver who accelerated, pumping out smoke from his exhaust pipe because he couldn't stand waiting this short distance seemed weird to Akatsuki. It was probably a secret that Akatsuki, who couldn't drive, couldn't comprehend.

Akatsuki, who was mindlessly watching the cars that detested gaps in the road, sneezed. She realized she had been sneezing since reaching this street and rubbed her nose. She regretted it immediately after rubbing. She couldn't shake this unfeminine habit no matter how hard she tried. Akatsuki kept sneezing because of the sour exhaust gas of the cars.

Akatsuki moved faster in an attempt to move ahead of the crowd. Although it was walking, it was more of a jog for Akatsuki.

She suddenly wondered where she needed to go. She should have a destination after squeezing with the crowd, and was definitely meeting with someone. Arriving at the appointed time, making plans to go somewhere. That's right... They were going to some place. A place of learning. Should be a college. But this goal vanished from Akatsuki's heart for some reason.

The sense of disappointment came faster than the feeling of confusion. In this street that was like a manufacturing line, she didn't have a destination, her heart and soul were being crushed by this sense of unease. Laughter, the sounds of advertisement cars, the screech of cars braking, the sound of the train in Yamato line passing by. The pain was stuck in her throat, her vision became blurry. Akatsuki wanted to stop, but she pushed herself on

so she wouldn't impede others. Passing by the blinking signal lights, walking past the convenience stores. Turning the corner at the bank, she moved forward. Forward and forward in the crowd. Going somewhere that was not here. Maybe everyone was just like that plastic bag, moving without a destination. Just like Akatsuki who could be simply replaced by someone else. But Akatsuki was the only proof that Akatsuki existed. It was fine even if this example could not be proven.

Before she knew it, she was running up a flight of stairs. The stairwell reminded her of a lonely apartment building. Although it was a place she was familiar with, it lacked substance, Akatsuki just couldn't remember where she had seen it. The important thing right now for Akatsuki was to climb up the stairs as fast as she could. This was not an enjoyable experience, she simply wanted to get away from this place.

She was not sure what she was running from, but she knew she would be captured if she hesitated and thought about it. It was probably the plastic bag. Being trampled on mercilessly, wet, sticky and tattered. It was sticking on her back— wrong, it was sticking to her sole as she climbed the stairs, making 'sha sha' noises. But there was no such sound if she listened carefully. She was wrong about the bag being stuck on her. But why was Akatsuki rushing so hastily, not daring to look at her feet? The disgusting pressure stuck into her spine like ice needles.

The lack of oxygen stopped her brain from thinking as she was unable to breathe. Even if she knew this was wrong, she couldn't prove it since she didn't know the correct answer. After reaching the top of the stairs, she used her momentum to head for the next flight of stairs as she ascended the stairwell. She ran like a rat on a wheel, giving her a sense of futility. She heard the sound of concrete being drilled somewhere and was running as if she were hating the concrete stairs itself. But she had to climb up the stairs in order to escape. This was a vicious cycle.

After climbing dozens or maybe hundreds of flights of stairs, Akatsuki realized this was not a stairwell. Her feet sank into wet concrete with the texture of glue. Akatsuki missed a step and fell together with the rest of the crowd. The horn of a car, the noise of advertisement, incomprehensible murmurs of conversation. Akatsuki fell into the abyss of howling wind and was certain she saw the plastic bag again.

A smooth white beach.

Clear blue skies.

The blue endless sea that looked like part of a watercolor palette, with ripples everywhere.

Akatsuki was walking alone on the beach.

The only person strolling on the vast coastline that was unique in the winter.

The sound of the sand crumbling at her feet made her fearful.

She lowered her head and saw her feet taking another step.

She left another footprint in the pure untainted white beach.

Looking at the shadow flying far far away, that was probably a seagull.

'Splash, splash'

She could hear faint footsteps in her ears as well as the blue waves washing up the beach.

She pulled her coat closer because of the chill and continued to walk.

She took her time, there was no need to hurry.

The sun reflected from the sea got in her eyes when she raised her head.

The winter sun didn't bring warmth, just blinding light.

Quiet footfalls and the tiny set of footprints extended out like a tiny chain.

Whenever her bare feet touched the blue sea, the shiny particles dissipated.

Akatsuki didn't know where this was, but she had completely calmed down.

This was not her destination, but it was a safe haven.

Strolling along the quiet beach was an enjoyable experience that put you at ease.

She didn't know how far she needed to travel.

She tried soaking her feet in the deep blue water and twirled it around in a circle.

She attempted to leave footprints close together like the dance of a bee.

Because she was alone, Akatsuki did all this with a serious face.

She tried expressing her joy with a smile.

Akatsuki's faithful footprints followed Akatsuki wherever she went.

She felt so happy that she wanted to include all this in her diary.

She squinted her eyes to look into the distance, a person appeared in Akatsuki's field of vision.

A tall figure swaying his body as he looked at the ocean with a troubled look.

Akatsuki was surprised by how light her body was, and realized she was running.

The distance that seemed far was much shorter than she imagined. She was close, within just a few steps and slowed her pace.

She was not the type that would throw her whole body out to embrace others.

But she still followed her feeling of affection to raise her head to look at that figure.

Shiroe smiled when he noticed Akatsuki.

Shiroe, who was always wearing a bitter and sullen expression, was smiling like this, making Akatsuki feel so satisfied.

A bit shy, shining brightly and embarrassed.

After a moment of hesitation, Shiroe, who was smiling with squinted eyes, acknowledged Akatsuki with a look and started walking along the beach.

Akatsuki walked with him akin to chasing the hem of his coat.

Shiroe was consciously taking it slow.

Shiroe remained silent just like Akatsuki beside him.

The echoes of the wind and the sound of the tides added to the beauty of the scene.

The two of them were hesitant to disturb this serenity.

(My lord's hands are big.)

Akatsuki thought as she looked at Shiroe, who brushed his hair and adjusted his glasses a couple of times.

She increased her pace as she looked at the pair of hands stuck into the coat pockets.

No, it was better to slow down.

Slowing down would give Akatsuki an excuse to tug at the hem of his coat.

Akatsuki pouted as she thought of this.

But she didn't look upset.

Akatsuki hid her expression, twirling along the coastline.

She must be smiling as she stretched her coat, the color of caramel.

Shiroe stopped, turning back to look at Akatsuki.

The two of them once again strolled on the beach that was like fine sugar. She knew the sand was changing its shape under their feet. She didn't mind the chilly breeze brushing across their cheeks. There was a warmth flowing in her body.

For Akatsuki, everything about this was precious and enjoyable. Shiroe's oversized boots sank into the sand. Akatsuki felt happy looking at the footprint that was deeper than hers. Shiroe looked cute when the occasional strong wind made his coat flutter.

Although Akatsuki wanted to try putting her hand into the pocket that was 5 times larger than her palm, it was too embarrassing for her. As a replacement, just looking at Shiroe and her footprints on the beach was enough to satisfy her.

The cold speck that fell on her nose surprised Akatsuki.

The pure white snow flakes were falling silently.

It melted the instant it touched her fingers, before she could feel its chill.

It was snowing.

Akatsuki looked up to convey this to Shiroe. Shiroe smiled and nodded, so Akatsuki knew there was no need to report this.

Shiroe helped Akatsuki wear the hood of her coat and continued walking.

She was not tired at all, but it felt like she had walked for a long time.

The sky gradually became transparent as it turned a darker shade of blue and shone like a gem.

The light from the water's surface seemed even brighter as the white snowflakes slowly fell in.

"I didn't think it would be this quiet."

Shiroe commented quietly and stopped.

The two of them had reached a cove before they realized it.

"Yeah."

Akatsuki answered.

She wanted to respond more emotionally and with more feminine charm, but she couldn't think of a good way to do that. Shiroe didn't seem to mind as he gazed out at the sea as dusk approached.

'Clang'

'Clang'

A sound similar to giant crystals colliding.

It appeared to be a signal from the other end of the boundless ocean.

Suddenly, Akatsuki was aware of something, but it was gone the moment it hit her.

Something that was not Akatsuki brushed across her heart.

Even though it did not belong to Akatsuki, this sense of loss filled her with sorrow.

A large hand rested on her upper arm gently. Akatsuki knew Shiroe was feeling the same thing. His expression was serious but not stern.

Shiroe pulled out a penknife and pushed out the blade. He cut off a part of his fringe awkwardly. The cut off hair shone strangely, numbering less than a bunch.

Akatsuki received the knife from Shiroe and shaved a small part of hair from her ponytail just like Shiroe did. She didn't know why she did it, but she understood in her heart that this was necessary.

They walked into the clear blue water and scattered the hair into the sea.

The sound of crystals colliding came from somewhere as if to acknowledge the receipt of something and the snow that didn't feel cold flew all around them.

Akatsuki understood these specks were the memories of everyone.

Death didn't rob people of their memories, it was the people who offered their memories for the chance to live again. Even if she didn't recall, deep in her heart was the desire to rise again, that was what Akatsuki knew.

"Amazing."

Shiroe's commented softly, Akatsuki felt the same.

How many memories did these flying snowflakes contain?

How many people made new resolutions on this beach?

The vast quantity and weight made Akatsuki dizzy.

Akatsuki believed that this was not a privilege or her right, but unbelievable luck.

Shiroe being beside her was also her luck.

"Did you fall, Akatsuki?"

Akatsuki pondered Shiroe's words for a moment and nodded.

(I am already dead.)

(Hit by the demonic blade of the Murderer.)

But that didn't matter.

It didn't mean everything was fine if she could respawn at the cathedral. Akatsuki fought out of her own will and fell. No regrets.

But she recalled the memory of the Akatsuki that fell. Memories of rushing out from Raynesia's residence into the sky, something important Soujirou conveyed to her, the determined profile of the Kannagi that was protecting Soujirou, something elegant and serious she learned from Rieze, Henrietta and the other girls she met at the tea party.

... And it ended.

What was this 'something'?

Akatsuki could only describe it as 'something'.

She didn't improve after experiencing that battle.

She regretted not understanding anything and was sorry about it. But she couldn't do anything but cry.

She touched something important. She finally noticed. But she didn't know what that 'something' was or what needed to be done. She knew it was something priceless, but she couldn't use it even though it was a gift.

Akatsuki wanted to explain it to Shiroe.

She wanted to tell Shiroe she found something precious and beautiful.

There was something important here. She couldn't confirm its existence, but it was gifted to her.

But she couldn't put it into words since she was not sure what that 'something' was.

Her heart was full of pain and regret as tears flowed from Akatsuki's eyes.

She couldn't express it to Shiroe in words. Akatsuki sensed that she had hurt this important thing. She was afraid that her incompetence might limit the value of this present.

There was definitely something there.

In the eyes of Raynesia.

In Soujirou's fearless smile.

Death didn't mean failure. To lose something that was at her fingertips, that was Akatsuki's failure.

No, it was right in front of her from the very beginning. If that were the case, the Akatsuki that did not notice this was made up of a series of failures. She knew this was true without needing anyone to point it out.

Once again, Akatsuki cried at her own incompetence. That was why she died without accomplishing anything.

"Is that so. I am the same too. I died."

Akatsuki raised her head when she felt a hand patting her. Shiroe looked troubled and smiled gently. Akatsuki knew Shiroe was worried about her. His self-mocking smile was the expression Akatsuki's guild master wore when talking to her.

"You too my lord?"

"Yeah."

They fell into silence.

Shiroe stroked Akatsuki's head, thinking with a troubled look on what to say. Akatsuki was fine with this awkward side of Shiroe, but Shiroe was concerned about that.

"I failed. My forecast was too naive... I didn't put in my trust."

His speech was not showing weakness, but a form of self reflection.

"I'm not sure."

Akatsuki replied in an equally strong manner.

"This is strange. I never thought I would meet Akatsuki here."

This sentence followed after countless snowflakes had fallen.

Akatsuki was surprised.

This was weird indeed. It had been a while since she met Shiroe.

Speaking of which, she wanted to see Shiroe.

Very much.

She wanted Shiroe to pat her head.

She remembered that she wished for Shiroe's compliments.

That was why this was a strange reunion.

They actually met in this place.

She didn't have time to think about it until now.

Encountering Shiroe here was such a weird experience.

Akatsuki was not sure, but she sensed that this was not a normal place. She was thankful for this miraculous coincidence.

"Right. My lord, this is strange."

She remembered the beach they strolled on and the deep blue sea.

In the bright scenery that had been bleached white, she could see Shiroe turning back to face her.

She rushed over and lifted her head, a large hand caressed her face.

It was just a coincidence.

But this coincidence was a blessing for Akatsuki.

She had no other wishes.

That thing Akatsuki was unable to get, would definitely be lying in wait within her reach.

But there should be countless such existences out there, in the dark corners Akatsuki had yet to notice. In the smiles she missed because she wasn't looking for it.

The luck in your hands would make one arrogant. You wouldn't think the luck you didn't have ever existed. Be it luck, encounters or assistance, they were lurking in all kinds of places waiting for Akatsuki to discover them.

"That's why, I want to try again."

"I want to have another go too... That's what everyone taught me."

Akatsuki grabbed Shiroe's coat tightly.

Just like the feeling of sand crumbling under their feet, Akatsuki sensed that this memory would be left behind.

That's why she grabbed on tightly even though it might crease the coat.

She would be separated from Shiroe again, she didn't say anything and clasped the coat strongly. But her wish was in vain as the endless sand dunes and its light grew brighter.

The sound of the ebbing tides faded along with the offered hair, taking some memories with it.

Following this, the surroundings turned into the dark blue sky and Akatsuki fell.

Part 3

It's okay.

The lingering sensation in Akatsuki's palm made her smile.

It's okay.

She could still feel the rough fabric from earlier.

It's okay.

When Akatsuki opened her eyes, her small hand was clenched as if she were holding on to something.

Akatsuki knew her memories were crumbling like the sand. Lying on the hard stone bed with tears on her cheeks, her memories of her dream were fading.

Akatsuki clenched her hand and wiped away her tears, attempting to wipe away the guilt and loneliness she felt in her dreams.

Akatsuki sat up on the simple marble bed.

For some reason, she felt as if she went through some incredible place.

Serene, lonely, gentle and translucent place.

Akatsuki journeyed there, encountered, awakened and stood up again.

She sensed that she had an important conversation she wanted to take with her.

She could still feel something in her hand. Probably, the sensation of a fabric. It faded away with the bits of gentleness she felt. Akatsuki willed

with all her might to stop memories of her dream from vaporizing, but she knew it was in vain.

The chime of the crystals faded off into the distant.

But she brought one crucial thing back with her.

She successfully brought the most important thing back with her.

Akatsuki checked for any missing equipment.

She carefully got up from bed.

This was her first death since the Catastrophe.

From her knowledge of Elder Tales and the rumors on the street, Akatsuki knew she would lose some EXP and memories when she respawned. She didn't know what she had forgotten.

Things about Log Horizon, Shiroe and everyone were still intact. Memories of the old world, her family, her childhood, she could roughly recall all of it.

If she tried to recollect the details, she might find something missing. But that would take a lot of time.

It was the same with her EXP loss, she didn't feel much different from before. The EXP loss was not large enough for her to lose levels. According to the rumours, the loss would make you feel lethargic. But Akatsuki couldn't tell whether her stiffness was from losing EXP or from sleeping on a hard marble bed. In other words, that was the extent of her discomfort.

She looked around her, this was the inside of the cathedral.

The white marble room had several marble beds, the walls were decorated with simple carvings.

This was the cathedral of Akiba. Akatsuki had memories of respawning in this place when Elder Tales was still a game a few times. Akatsuki started walking as she adjusted her Kodachi on her waist.

There was so much to do.

As she walked down the corridor, she raised her gaze and saw the winter sun gradually rising through the clouds. The battle started at midnight, so respawning took half a day? No, that wasn't it. She probably continued to

sleep on the marble bed after she respawned, relaxed from the tension of battle. That was probably why she was aching all over.

Akatsuki looked around the cathedral that was bigger than it appeared from the outside as she walked.

There were things she had to do.

There were things she must do.

She couldn't give up even after losing the first time. Akatsuki realized how lazy she was. She wanted to give her all in battles. She thought she worked harder than others. That was her just deceiving herself. Just excuses. There was so much more she could do. Akatsuki had been avoiding things that had to be done. She only focused on the things she preferred to do, and thought that was working hard.

Akatsuki made up her mind to move forward as she walked past the stained glass of the cathedral.

From Akatsuki's field of vision, the streets of Akiba should be right down these wide stairs.

But an unexpected scene awaited her.

"Are you alright? Does it hurt anywhere?"

Akatsuki's sight was enveloped in darkness when she hesitated a moment and was bear hugged. Henrietta twirled around as she rubbed her face on Akatsuki and said 'so cute~'. No matter how petite, it was a feat to lift a grown woman up, thanks to the strength of an Adventurer. But Henrietta didn't seem to care.

"I was thinking that it's about time for you to wake up."

Rieze, who was leaning on the stair's railing, commented. Behind her, Raynesia, who was wrapped in thick furry clothes, lowered her head apologetically. Standing behind them was a lady with fox ears crossing her arms and smiling confidently. She was the Kannagi from West Wind Brigade who had fought that night.

"..."

Akatsuki was speechless.

She knew her expression was becoming serious and gloomy.

It's not that she disliked everyone.

She was reaping what she sowed. Till now, she didn't have any close friends of the same age and gender, she didn't know what to say.

But she knew in her heart there was something she had to do. From the dream that was lost to Akatsuki, this was the only thing she brought back. She grabbed the hand Henrietta placed on her stomach. She faced the stunned Henrietta, Rieze, fox ear lady and the troubled Raynesia.

Landing on her feet, Akatsuki lowered her head.

"I know this is rude to say this, but I have a request for everyone. Please teach me about Overskill. I want to apprehend that Murderer."

The surprised fox ear lady and Henrietta standing behind Akatsuki gasped. Raynesia wore a pained expression.

"Mr Soujirou was using Overskill right, Miss Nazuna?"

"Yeah. That's right."

"But, that won't work."

"Indeed."

In response to Rieze's query, the fox ear lady full of adult charm, called Nazuna, answered.

"Despite it not working, why are you still seeking the Overskills?"

Rieze turned the conversation back to Akatsuki.

Akatsuki bit her lips.

She couldn't explain it well. Everyone must be thinking she was being willful for seeking Overskills. Even though her chest was full of regret, she was unable to think of any other explanation.

"Miss Akatsuki."

At this point, her eyes met Rieze.

The girl about Akatsuki's age stared at Akatsuki with a plain expression.

Akatsuki still couldn't believe she was a core member of a large guild. The lady known as Nazuna, Raynesia, even Henrietta all did their best interacting with others within their social group while fulfilling their duties.

Akatsuki made her decision. If she backed off now, she wouldn't improve. She could just do all she could, fail and comfort herself by saying she tried her best. But there were battles she didn't want to lose, Akatsuki knew there were times like that in her life. No matter who she had to beg, no matter how pitiful she acted, there were still obstacles she wanted to overcome.

"I want to terminate that Murderer."

Akatsuki said with resolve, but her conversational skills were mediocre.

"Not just Overskills. If you have any way of stopping that man, please tell me. Please bear with my willfulness this time."

"You think you can win?"

The question was asked by Nazuna in a lukewarm tone. The healer from West Wind Brigade who supported Soujiro until the very last moment. She was a Kannagi with long black hair and wore her Kimono sloppily. Akatsuki answered immediately.

"I don't know. But it won't end even if we defeat him... If we don't go to the extent of terminating him, it won't end. That's how I feel, we can't let this go on."

Akatsuki continued as if she left behind the frustration of being unable to convey her thoughts properly.

She hated her awkward self.

"If my lord were here, he would be able to do it... So, we have to do this."

Questioning eyes pierced Akatsuki.

They were wondering about the words 'If Shiroe were here'.

Even though she steeled herself, Akatsuki was still stammering and hesitant.

"... Right now, my lord is not in Akiba."

This was the secret Akatsuki and Log Horizon had been hiding.

Shiroe was not here. Being buried in endless work to run the Round Table Council was a lie. Shiroe was probably doing things only Shiroe could accomplish. But she didn't know what it was. But Shiroe requested for Akatsuki to stay behind to guard the base.

That was why Akatsuki had to protect everyone from the crisis that Shiroe could manage.

That was her promise to him.

"Miss Nazuna is asking whether you can win."

Facing Rieze's question, Akatsuki grew timid.

She couldn't promise such things.

There was no guarantee.

Please don't make her promise such things.

"... I can't do this alone. That's why I need others to help me. Please, help me."

This was an unbearable torment for Akatsuki. This way of saying things was akin to admitting she was still an incompetent child, as painful as cutting her skin. The curse-like sensation grew in her heart, lamenting the limited capability of her petite body.

But Shiroe had made a similar request in front of Akatsuki before.

Akatsuki was surprised by the warmth of Henrietta's hands which hugged her from behind. Nazuna smiled sheepishly without a word.

"I knew it would come to this when Souji said he would not meddle with this. There are so many stubborn people at Shiroe's side, birds of a feather do flock together."

"I can only give you half credit. From the view of the training corps, there is a need for 3 more sessions of extra training. There are 8 sets of Overskill uncovered by my guild... Permission has been granted from my lord. They will be taught to Akatsuki."

The blonde girl announced gently.

"Me too, there is something I have to do."

The silent Raynesia nodded and said with a pale face.

"... Really, I didn't expect to act like a middle schooler after coming to Serdesia."

With the soft sigh of Rieze, the mini raid party was formed.

For Akatsuki, this was a huge step forward.

Part 4

Mikakage took small bites from her rice ball.

The take out meal from Attachment rice ball house was popular in Rod Lab. Statistics weren't compiled properly, but the word from the grapevine suggested that half the lunches in this guild came from Attachment rice ball house.

Behind Mikakage was a young People of the Land girl wearing a triangle head scarf with excellent service. She was giving out rice balls along with take out receipts. Her shoulder length hair and variety of expressions made her look cute. Her name was Kaede.

Attachment rice ball house was operated by 20 odd People of the Land, but 5 of them were idolized by others because of their cuteness. They were so popular in Rod Lab that a fan club had been started. Kaede and Kuderya were vying for the top spot on the popularity listing, Mikakage recalled seeing her posters in the science building.

(No, now is not the time to think about all this. That's not important.)

Mikakage frowned and ate her rice ball.

She didn't have the leisure to think about the popularity rankings of female bento clerks.

Mikakage was one of the people causing this commotion. But she was not responsible for this. Mikakage was simply reporting the results of the survey and the possibility in the future, so she didn't need to take responsibility. But it still made her gloomy.

Mikakage offered the rice ball to her tiny plant fairy companion who was climbing up her thigh, the Alraune^[7] Ellie. The Alraune held the rice ball with her round hands and took a big bite out of it. Mikakage looked around her after being healed emotionally by this soothing scene.

This semicircle conical shape hall was an auditorium.

About 80% of it was occupied.

At lunch time, the majority of the participants would take their meals from their bag and open the rice ball delivery packaging.

Normally, there should be more people going outside or to the cafeteria to eat, but because of the contents of the day, there were less people opting to do that.

There were meetings in the morning and the afternoon, but the morning meeting was closer to being a research presentation. It would probably be the same in the afternoon.

The guild members saw Rod Lab to be an organization like a college, so its meeting was akin to a graduate research presentation.

There was a heavy atmosphere in the auditorium.

It was not a bright mood. Everyone seemed deflated. But rather than simple disappointment, there was a feeling of excitement brewing in their hearts. You could see specialized groups discussing in low voices wherever you looked.

There were also groups with members of different specializations conversing together.

That's how shocking the announcement in the morning was.

"This is probably a good thing."

Her colleague Aomori commented with a mouthful of rice.

"Is this really a good thing?"

"Erm... Maybe?"

Mikakage nodded vaguely and responded half-heartedly to Aomori.

It was hard to say it was a bad thing.

In the morning, Mikakage gave a presentation.

In Rod Lab, there were several presentation events every month. It was the same for the gourmet department Mikakage was in. But the

presentation was usually held in the form of a food tasting session. Mikakage expended all her energy in the morning presentation.

As a Chef, Mikakage seldom did presentations in the form of hard data, and was not accustomed to long hours of academic discussion. This was a heavy burden on the Chef Mikakage, and she resented her colleagues who shoved this work to her in her heart.

She kicked Aomori away, stole a piece of fried chicken and fed it to Ellie.

"What are you doing?"

"Ellie~ is it good?"

The introverted Ellie did not reply, biting into the chicken. Mikakage relaxed as she watched her cute familiar.

Even Adventurers who didn't have the subclass of Chef were gradually able to cook.

That was the gist of Mikakage's report.

There were 2 ways of preparing food in this world right now.

The first was using the game menu. Using the ingredients listed in your crafting recipe you 'learned', you could cook using the game menu while standing beside cooking appliances. By choosing the things you wanted to cook from the game menu, it would be made.

No matter what cuisine it was, the cooking time was always 10 seconds.

There was a big advantage in using this method. The first was cooking time. Be it stewed or fermented food, they all took 10 seconds.

Another advantage was the amount of ingredients that were consumed. The maximum number of ingredients used for crafting items was 5, which included seasoning. Take potato and beef for instance, the ingredients were potato x3, beef x1, strong soy sauce x1. There were no onions or carrots, not even seasoning spices. But the finished products appeared to have these ingredients included, appearing out of nowhere.

Of course there was major disadvantage. The crafted product, no matter what ingredients or menu you used, all tasted like soggy crackers. You couldn't really tell whether they had any taste. Its texture was like chewing a soft energy bar, unappetizing.

Another way was to cook the food manually by hand.

To cook using the methods of the old world. They were not restricted by the crafting menus and were totally dependent on the recipe the chef came up with. The ingredients to make the food were all necessary, and things wouldn't appear out of nowhere. The freshness of the ingredients would also affect the completeness of the cuisine. This meant the same logic as the real world applied.

But for both methods, the main difference from the real world was the need for the one cooking to have the Chef subclass. Another feature was the importance of the Chef level when making food through either method.

If you cooked using the menu, the chance of success in making dishes would be low if your Chef level did not meet the prerequisite.

For manual cooking, there was no way to tell what was the prerequisite level to make food, but complicated cooking involving steaming or frying would have a high chance of failure.

Failing in either method would result in the ingredients turning into burnt debris or mysterious paste, just like the game.

Adventurers without the Chef subclass would fail no matter what food they tried to make. No matter how skilled you were on earth, you couldn't even make salads in this world. This was now common knowledge after the Catastrophe.

But this common knowledge was losing ground.

Even Adventurers without the Chef subclass were able to do simple seasoning or cut up ingredients. They were able to make salads now.

Why was that so? They were not sure.

They didn't know anything about the Catastrophe in the first place, the meaning behind this change was also unclear.

It was easy to tell that this would have huge repercussions.

Even chefs like Mikakage were unable to tell when this change came about. The Round Table Council discovered the restriction of crafting items in the early days. That's how the Round Table Council was founded in the first place.

Rod Lab became a gathering of people with similar subclasses because of this. Mikakage was surrounded by other Chefs. Including Mikakage, all members had a very high level. It was common knowledge that meals were made by the Chef members of the guild or bought from other Chefs.

That's why no one was sure when this change came about.

According to the survey of the gourmet department of Rod Lab, about half the Adventurers were able to make salads with a decent chance of success. Even those who failed commented that it felt different from before.

They were able to confirm the phenomenon was happening.

But they were unable to tell whether this was the result of the unconscious effort put in by individuals, the increase in capabilities of Adventurers, or a loophole in the game restrictions. They also determined this was happening to the People of the Land as well. Even the plant fairy Ellie could do it too.

The frightening thing about this was that it was not only restricted to cooking.

For example, the Constructor subclass focused on construction, while furniture was made by Carpenters. These were fixed according to the rules of Elder Tales.

But after the presentation in the morning, other reports similar to Mikakage's department findings were starting to surface.

Construction and crafting were not techniques modern men were familiar with, unlike cooking, so there was a smaller sample size for them to go by. But from the few cases that had been confirmed, there was enough experimental data to shake the foundation of the theories they had built to this day.

Mikakage was not the only one who was shaken.

Be it Aomori or other friends in the auditorium, all the members of Rod Lab sensed some form of premonition.

Mikakage raised her gaze when she sensed the hall quieting down.

The members in the hall focused on Roderick standing on the podium. The people who were stuffing themselves with rice balls and sandwiches during lunch hour looked at Roderick with a puzzled expression.

Wearing a shabby white lab coat, the usually calm and relaxed Roderick addressed the hall while scratching his head with a tired look.

"Ah... Sorry for interrupting your lunch, but the long awaited experimental results are finally out. Starting from this afternoon, we will need to shift our focus, so let me say a few words. Lunch will be extended another hour. And by changing gears, I mean we will be shifting our focus to developing countermeasures."

Hearing this announcement caused an uproar in the auditorium.

Going as far as to research countermeasures, this was half the reason the people in the hall were shocked. The other half was because the cautious Roderick decided to play an active role in this matter.

"It's fine to listen to me while you eat. There are 3 things I need to announce. I will start with the appearance reset potion and its difference from the game world. According to various case studies... or rather, based on all the cases, there have been reports that your personality will be affected by your body, but it seems that the voice will be affected too. It's not certain if this has something to do the vocal cords structure of the body, but Adventurers with female bodies will gradually sound more feminine. This is so even for players who are male in the old world."

The untimely sound of a pen dropping onto the floor marked the end of this statement.

The auditorium was so quiet that the pen dropping seemed so loud.

"Next is the studies on optics... Ah, regarding this, we have not confirmed the results yet. We can't be certain even if we measured it again. Even so, I think this is an established fact. The distance between Akiba and Mount Fuji is growing. Meaning the distances between any two places are getting larger."

This report was like a bolt out of the blue for all those present.

"Excuse me..."

A craftsman raised his hand timidly. Roderick acknowledged this question which was asked on everyone's behalf.

"Is this happening everywhere? Does this mean that Yamato... is expanding?"

"That's our hypothesis."

Roderick's response made everyone gasp.

"One last thing, this is the result of a study commissioned by an external source... The flavor text describing the background of an item, has been found to be effective for some tested items."

Mikakage was dumbstruck.

Flavor text had significant effects? What did this mean?

Take a magic weapon for example. 'Attack +5%, additional flame damage 180~216, STR +15'. This was the magical prowess of the weapon. Able to provide additional powers to normal weapons, strengthening them.

In contrast, flavor text would go something like this. 'The flaming spear is gifted to the excellent knights of the ancient Westelande army. The decorative flame dragon tooth is embedded with the hidden flame prowess. It is said that Logger Zari used this spear to inspire his men.' The text described the features and origin of the item. You could read this information by appraising items, but it had no influence in the game, it just added some lore to let players immerse themselves in the world of Elder Tales.

Flavor text only existed to provide some entertainment for the masses.

They had no effects. That's why they were called flavor text. That's all.

But what if they were in effect?

Mikakage was not able to grasp what this might mean.

Because she didn't understand, she looked towards Aomori.

Aomori didn't know either and stared back at Mikakage.

Most of the people in the auditorium were looking at each other.

Roderick closed his eyes and let out a sigh. It was time to bring up the pressing issues, and the members were prepared for it.

"These are not independent phenomenon. It is not a coincidence for all these to be happening in this same period of time. This means we have to treat this as one big incident. Right now, this world is going through a major change. The Catastrophe has not ended. I propose we collate data on a grand scale."

Roderick's speech stunned every single member in the auditorium.

Most of the citizens of Akiba didn't know about this phenomenon yet.

Part 5

Akatsuki and Raynesia sat side by side in the bustling office.

In front of them were Rieze and Henrietta. Many maids were walking around, busy with work, while Nazuna was eating a strawberry Daifuku lazily.

Akatsuki, who was brought back straight from the cathedral, was told to eat both breakfast and lunch together while they asked her for the details.

Akatsuki found it hard to explain the details and looked at Raynesia from time to time. Henrietta directed Raynesia to sit beside Akatsuki.

The luxurious carpet was fluffy enough for her to sit on her knees comfortably. Akatsuki had always lived in a Japanese home, so she was fine with sitting on her knees. But what about Raynesia? She looked uncomfortable as she did her best to imitate Akatsuki.

"I have a rough idea of the situation. The Murderer is a Person of the Land, one of the Kunie clan. That means his powers originate from the mobile suit. It is powered by the magic circle used to defend the city, giving him the strength of a Full Raid Boss."

Raynesia lowered her head when faced with Rieze's words.

It seemed like Raynesia had explained everything to the tea party participants.

Akatsuki was surprised.

People of the Land killing Adventurers.

Raynesia, who was panicking when she found out about this, should have been cowering in fear and trouble. But she was wearing a determined face as she looked at Rieze and Henrietta while sitting beside Akatsuki.

But that might be within expectation. This was the People of the Land princess whom Akatsuki wanted to help. She even rode here on a griffon to raise a volunteer army for the war of Sand Leaf.

"... If the public knew about this, the relationship between People of the Land and Adventurers might deteriorate. If distrust in the Kunie clan rises, it will fracture life in the city. Akatsuki is worried about this, and wants to resolve the issue, not kill the Murderer. Am I right?"

Akatsuki maintained her position and thought for a moment before nodding her head.

That was how her thoughts would sound like in words.

She still remembered her actions of taking off into the night without any plans. Akatsuki just wanted to convey to others that Raynesia was not at fault. If she could stop the Murderer, she would be able to express her feelings. No, she was rationalizing it this way after the fact, she really wasn't thinking back then, just acting on a whim. She was just throwing a tantrum at the world that didn't understand her and Raynesia.

She didn't want to express these thoughts into words, so Akatsuki just looked at Rieze in silence.

"I can understand how you feel. I don't think we can hide this matter for long, but to resolve this as soon as possible and suppress the commotion is the important thing."

"We already have quite a number of victims after all."

Nazuna took some sweet sake from her bag, interrupting Rieze's lecture.

"... Will West Wind Brigade expose this incident?"

"Erm, no. Soujirou is taking his hands off this. We won't expose this or seek revenge. There are definitely people in the guild who are against this, but Soujirou will think of something. That's the type of guild we are. I'm the one who cleans up the mess. But all this is dependent on what the two of them decide."

"Erm..."

"Let's not confirm this in a roundabout manner and lecture them directly."

Rieze and Henrietta sighed at Nazuna's suggestion.

They were not trying to ignore Nazuna, but wished that she would go through the process normally. But Nazuna didn't seem to care. She looked really lazy and didn't care about the gaze of others, showing off her snow white cleavage supported by her chain mail. The way she was lying on the sofa looked more like a big cat instead of a fox.

She looked different without the tension of battle in the air. Akatsuki thought this was how Nazuna was when she was relaxed. Maybe that was her true self.

(But a real 'true self' doesn't exist...)

The Shiroe that patted Akatsuki's head was her real lord.

But the one hard at work reading complicated letters was also her true lord, the one coordinating fights on the battlefield was also the real lord.

It might pain her heart, but the one complimenting Minori and smiling at Maryele was also her real lord.

Raynesia beside her had lost her usual dreamy grace. She was not exhausted, just wearing a determined expression.

There were no complete lies in this world.

In this world that had become slightly wider and more colorful, Akatsuki understood this fact.

There were many truths in this world.

"Is that everything?"

Henrietta crossed her arms and said calmly to Akatsuki and Raynesia.

"You wanted to do everything yourself because of your ego. You already know the right thing to do is to discuss it over with everyone correct? Both of you, aren't you letting the blood rush to your head too much? Are you treating those around you like idiots?"

Henrietta's eyes were no longer mischievous.

It was a very serious expression.

Akatsuki had nothing to say. Henrietta was right.

It was fine at first. She could use the excuse that she went off with a head full of steam.

But she didn't have any excuses now since she had been hiding behind Shiroe's shadow all this while.

When things got out of hand, she didn't approach others to resolve the issue. Nyanta, Naotsugu, even the junior team Minori and Tohya, she could have conversed more with them.

Akatsuki did support their activities, such as guarding them in the dark, providing ingredients, scouting the training grounds in advance. But she avoided moving or conversing with them, even though she had no reason to.

Because this was not her area of responsibility, she avoided it with excuses.

Akatsuki was in pain after others sensed this.

"How long do you want to keep at this alone? Are you still wishfully thinking that everything will be fine if Mr Shiroe is by your side?"

Akatsuki lowered her head while listening to the lecturing voice of Henrietta.

She had nothing to say. That was absolutely right.

She was overly reliant on her lord, so she became useless when her lord was not around. She couldn't even keep her promise with her lord. Even though Akatsuki was the only one he had asked this of.

"Did you intend to just be a guard when you came to this consulate?"

Sensing someone answering the query she wanted to ask, Akatsuki raised her head.

"Visiting the Water Maple Consulate, becoming part of the security regime is not the sole task of Akatsuki. That's Rieze and my role as well."

Akatsuki's face turned red from shame and pain.

It was only natural if she thought about it. Raynesia was one of the most important women in Akiba. There was no way for Akatsuki to guard her

alone. Raynesia's tea party was Shiroe's instruction. This was very obvious.

Thinking that 'Shiroe is depending on me' was such a lofty thought.

This pain and regret turned into tears.

But now was not the time for crying. Akatsuki definitely wanted to protect Raynesia. And not just as a guard protecting her life. That day, that moment, the girl shouldering the heavy burdens for the People of the Land, she should be watching over her noble dream.

"Lady Akatsuki is, ermmm... Eh."

Raynesia who found it hard to interject spoke.

But she was stopped by Rieze.

"I want to borrow your strength. I have to."

Akatsuki struggled to form her words.

"Ah, as promised, Rieze and I will help. But who are you saying these words to?"

This was a hard question for Akatsuki.

Who were these words for? For Henrietta and Rieze? Or Nazuna? Or for Mikakage and the others who were not around?

Whoever it was for. She was asking for their aid. Did she have the right to do that?

But, there was definitely something here.

Just that Akatsuki was unable to find the right words to describe this gift.

Akatsuki definitely noticed in that faded dream.

The thing that overflowed in the light of dawn tormented Akatsuki.

She was holding on to Shiroe's coat, but her hands were empty when she woke.

She couldn't bring it back from the dream.

There was a sense of frustration and unhappiness in her heart.

It was right here in her chest but she was unable to tell everyone.

Akatsuki felt like tearing her chest open in order to share her wish and thoughts with everyone.

But that was not something they could see if she opened her chest.



Blaming her own incompetence, Akatsuki's expression became twisted and tears started to fall.

"Lady Akatsuki is my friend!"

Raynesia shook off Rieze's restraint and said with anger, shocking Akatsuki.

It filled a hole in Akatsuki's heart.

They were words that were lost because she failed to hold on to them, the key to Akatsuki's closed off heart.

This sentence that she had never expected the silver haired princess to say, Akatsuki felt warmth and strength returning to her.

"Raynesia is working hard. That's why I want to help. Everyone... please help, everyone. Ermm... because we are friends..."

She was unable to speak properly.

She was full of embarrassment and helplessness.

But she had the resolve to see this through.

In order to break through this situation she was unhappy with, Akatsuki took a half step forward.

Just a tiny step.

The word 'friend' came out of her mouth along with her hesitation.

Akatsuki had come to understand this in her heart.

Raynesia who seemed to be smiling from a faraway place was real, the Raynesia who was seething in anger beside Akatsuki was also real. The Henrietta who treated Akatsuki like a toy was real, but so was the Henrietta lecturing her. Rieze who did in-depth research on the clothing of the People of the Land was real and so was the Rieze who commanded the troops in battle.

If she looked carefully, there were many people who cared about Akatsuki around her.

Akatsuki was not inferior or mediocre. The Akatsuki who couldn't forgive herself was also the real Akatsuki.

There were so many people concerned about the Akatsuki who fell to the blade of the Murderer.

She was starting to understand why Rieze referred to her as a middle schooler. She was at middle school level after all. To only learn all this now, Akatsuki thought she was worse than Minori. But she did not panic. It was correct to say that she was not as good as Minori. And the people worrying about her were right in front of her eyes.

"I understand. Let's start the strategy session. In order to end this problem. I already have permission from the Round Table Council to impose a curfew. Let's subdue the Murderer 3 nights from now."

Rieze's words calmed Akatsuki. She would get it right this time.

Part 6

Henrietta looked out at the streets from the top of the stairs.

Although most of the leaves had fallen from the trees, there were still some evergreen trees on the streets. The greenery scattered amongst the grey ruins looked pleasing to the eyes. Crescent Moon Alliance was based in this guild building, so she was used to the scenery, just that the elevation was different.

The guild hall of the Crescent Moon Alliance was on the fifth floor. This corridor was on the tenth floor. They were both on the upper levels of the guild building, but her destination right now was the Round Table conference room.

Henrietta kept walking. With the lift just a decoration in this world, it was a pain to climb all these stairs. But with the durable body of Adventurers, it was not an issue, they could even make round trips ferrying wooden crates without breaking a sweat.

The staircase revealing its concrete base seemed to be cold, but it was not a problem for Henrietta as she reached her destination floor.

Henrietta greeted the People of the Land girl she was acquainted with and entered the secretariat. This was the core of the Round Table Council. The Round Table Council referred to the governing organization based on its 11 founding guilds, while the secretariat was where the administrative work was done.

It would be unnatural for the 11 guilds setting the policies of Akiba to not have a central base of operations... Such an opinion was gaining strength among the public, so each of the 11 guilds set up an office in the secretariat. But most of the 11 guilds were all major guilds big enough to run Akiba by themselves, so their guild master usually had an office in their own guild base, doing all sorts of administrative work in their private offices. The mid size guild Crescent Moon Alliance also had a private office for their guild master Maryele, decorated according to her preferences.

That was why the offices in the secretariat were run by people working on shift, serving as a communications base. Unfortunately, Crescent Moon Alliance did not have the manpower to be on duty at all times, so Henrietta would check in periodically to handle the letters and paperwork.

There were many People of the Land working in the secretariat.

They were not only hired to handle the menial tasks, but also to test the possibility of Adventurers working alongside People of the Land. They might be tasked to handle liaisons in the future, but that concept had not been put into action yet. The People of the Land were busy enough without the extra duties, handling the coordination and notification of hundreds of guilds.

Henrietta headed for the office after greeting them, and screamed softly when she arrived. The documents had once again piled into a mountain on the desk. She had gotten used to it, but she still felt dejected looking at this. Crescent Moon Alliance who had been assigned lesser work was already in such a state, Henrietta didn't want to imagine how the other guilds must be like.

Henrietta sorted the papers deftly, putting them in the wooden crate she brought. Their numbers were great, but most of them were reports and acknowledgement notices. Those that didn't need to be brought back to the guild hall were signed and sorted into the permitted box.

She fell into her office work routine and reminisced over the events of the past few days.

Things progressed speedily after that day.

Rieze's command was excellent, but the other participants were also a match for her. If you thought about it, Nazuna, Kyoko and Azuki might be girls, but they took part in major raids before the Catastrophe, so moving as a team should be a piece of cake for them.

Raynesia's living room was now the temporary operational base, Rieze had moved a table from her guild to the room. It was also a hive of activities over there, matching the hectic pace of the secretariat. Large amounts of notes containing various data overflowed during the editing and amendment process. The Adventurers like Henrietta who lived on modern earth without papers got a headache just looking at this scene.

The members called this anti-murderer mission 'operation capture' or 'operation retake'. The base was set in Raynesia's place, so the members were limited to the female tea party participants. Henrietta and Maryele were also a part of this.

There were 2 central figures, Akatsuki and Raynesia. Not only were the 2 of them not good at this, they were not suitable as well. They were experiencing all of this for the first time, making them nervous and uncomfortable. As the initiators, the 2 of them were at the core of all this, but they were not reliable in group maneuvers. That was why Rieze and Henrietta would be managing in their stead.

That was the only way.

Henrietta, who was frustrated with all the paperwork, leaned back on her leather chair and stared at the ceiling. Unless they were looking for her, only members of Crescent Moon Alliance would enter the office, so she was assuming a more relaxed position than usual.

In her guild, the lively members headed by Maryele were all running about, so she couldn't think in peace. Henrietta adjusted her glasses gently and sighed as she took out a card from her card holder.

A plain card with just a few simple words written on it.

This card was linked to a bank account.

This card represented the only bank in Elder Tales, that was situated on the first floor of this guild building. It was an ATM card that didn't exist in Elder Tales before.

Elder Tales was a game before the Catastrophe. The bank here was not the same as the old world, it was a non profit organization that stored the money and items of players. No, it was not even a non profit organization, it was simply a game function.

In the game, the moment the character was born, meaning when you started playing, an account would be set up automatically for you. It was the same with guilds, an account was given the moment it was founded. This was all done by default, there was no need to spend time applying for an account, but you couldn't oppose it being created for you either. That's how the setting for bank accounts was. The bank didn't provide statements of accounts or ATM cards. Because the game was able to identify the users and manage the account accurately without needing all this.

But it was different for the card in front of her.

This was one of the cards that was planned for 3 representatives from the Round Table Council to utilize. It represented a certain bank account that didn't belong to a person or a guild. It held potential beyond the imagination of the Adventurers of Yamato.

"... This is why I was hoping it would be peaceful during this period of time."

Henrietta spun the card on top of her finger and closed her eyes.

She had already felt that Shiroe was not in Akiba. Although she was not informed outright, Shiroe entrusting this card to her... it was a clear sign.

This card was meaningless right now. Because there was no money in this account and there were no transactions linked to it. It was just an account set up in advance.

But its potential in the future was bright.

Henrietta understood this point. She shivered just at the thought of how this card might be used.

They had not publicly disclosed the existence of this card because the card was still meaningless right now. That was to say it was still in the experimental phase, it was not the time to announce it yet. That's what Henrietta heard about this. On the other hand, Henrietta sensed that this was not the whole truth.

Shiroe was probably wary of information leaks if they announced it prematurely.

Akatsuki hiding Shiroe's absence was also proof of this.

Krusty, Shiroe, Michitaka and the others were preparing for 'problems that might arise in the future', and the existence of enemies was one of them. Unfortunately, they had to be wary of enemies from within the Round Table Council itself.

Henrietta could feel Plant Hwyaden looking towards Akiba from the west. The small but infamous 'Odyssey' faction was also fearsome.

(Believing they can return to earth after clocking enough deaths...)

Henrietta sighed at their absurd idea. These troubles were too much for an accountant from a mid sized guild to bear, there was no way she could handle it. But who would shoulder this responsibility? Just leaving everything to Shiroe was easy to say, but was that right? Shiroe was even younger than Henrietta.

(Right, that person who is darker than black is younger than me. Really.)

Shiroe was probably not interested in Henrietta as an individual. All the things he did were not for Henrietta's sake. Henrietta couldn't just assume Shiroe could shoulder all this and leave him alone, that would be abandoning him.

That was why she had to take part in the hunt for the Murderer. Henrietta was sure of it.

Rieze would direct the battle aspect, so Henrietta would help from another angle. She would provide the stubborn Shiroe with covering fire. Henrietta thought it would be nice to lend him a hand.

After dancing at the ball in the Ancient Palace of Eternal Ice with Shiroe, Henrietta felt fine with helping him. Aiding Shiroe and Akatsuki from the dark suited Henrietta's personality well.

Rieze was training the teamwork and discipline of Akatsuki and the other battle members.

Before dusk was Overskill training. There were several other volunteers besides Akatsuki taking part, so information pertaining to Overskills was becoming more commonplace.

After dinner and their conference, Akatsuki, Rieze and the others would spread out in Akiba for surveillance, hunting for the Murderer.

After listening to the reports of Akatsuki and Nazuna, Rieze thought the Murderer would not resurface in the next few days. Henrietta felt the same, and was thankful for this window of time. The Murderer who suffered the fierce attacks of Soujiro and Akatsuki had taken a huge amount of damage, and would need time to recuperate. Since he was not an Adventurer, he would need more than one night.

Henrietta negotiated with the Round Table Council to impose a night curfew in Akiba.

This was the plan they came up with after discussing with Rieze to prevent more victims and lure the Murderer out. Akatsuki and the others on guard duty would patrol till dawn and sleep in the morning.

Now was also the time for Henrietta to work.

Henrietta listed the people she needed to convince and got up. She dumped everything on the desk into the wooden crate without sorting it and contacted Hien through telepathy.

The first was Michitaka and Charasin, followed by members in the 11 guilds. This task could become a cover for Shiroe's plan too. Henrietta was not sure how much of this was predicted by Shiroe, and smiled with a mischievous feeling.

"Not everything will go as Shiroe planned, especially... the resolve of the ladies."

CHAPTER.



RAID BATTLE [大 規 模 戦 闘]

▶ NAME: RAYNESIA	
	▶ LEVEL: 14
	▶ RACE: HUMAN
	▶ CLASS: NOBLE (PRINCESS OF THE ROSE GARDEN)
	▶ HP: 1147
	▶ MP: 695
	▶ ITEM 1: [FLYING SWALLOW CHOKER]
	<p>NECKLACE WITH A SHINY DEEP BLUE OCEAN STONE CARVED IN A SHAPE OF A SLEEK SWALLOW. RAYNESIA BOUGHT IT BECAUSE SHE WAS DRAWN BY IT'S BEAUTIFUL SHAPE AND COLOR, EVEN THOUGH SHE DOESN'T THINK IT SUITS HER. TO GIVE AWAY AS A PRESENT IS TROUBLESOME BECAUSE IT'S HARD TO DECIDE IF IT'LL LOOK GOOD ON THEM.</p>
	▶ ITEM 2: [BLANKET WITH POCKETS]
	<p>LAP BLANKET WITH POCKETS WOVEN USING COLD-RESISTANT MATERIALS. IF YOU PUT IN A HEAT PACK IT BECOMES SLIGHTLY WARMER, YOU MIGHT NOT WANT TO PULL YOUR HAND OUT AND YOUR MIND WILL WANDER SO BE CAREFUL. IT SEEMS THE PRINCESS SAYS "ALTHOUGH IT'S NOT A MAGICAL ITEM, IT IS MAGICAL".</p>
	▶ ITEM 3: [FUR OF PERFECT WHITE RABBIT]
<p>PURE WHITE COAT MADE FROM THE FUR OF 'PERFECT WHITE RABBIT' THAT LIVE IN EZZO. GIFT FROM A FASHION-BASED GUILD IN AKIBA, IT PROVIDES NO DEFENSE, BUT IT IS VERY POPULAR AMONGST FEMALES. ELESSA HAS TO TAKE CARE OF IT BECAUSE IT IS OBVIOUS WHEN WHITE CLOTHING IS DIRTY.</p>	

Name: Raynesia

Level: 14

Race: Human

Class: Noble (Princess of the Rose Garden)

HP: 1147

MP: 695Equipment

Flying Swallow Choker

Necklace with a shiny deep blue ocean stone carved in a shape of a sleek swallow. Raynesia bought it because she was drawn by its beautiful shape and color, even though she doesn't think it suits her. To give away as a present is troublesome because it's hard to decide if it'll look good on them.

Blanket with Pockets

Lap blanket with pockets woven using cold-resistant materials. If you put in a heat pack it becomes slightly warmer, you might not want to pull your hand out and your mind will wander so be careful. It seems the Princess says "Although it's not a magical item, it is magical".

Fur of Perfect White Rabbit

Pure white coat made from the fur of 'Perfect White Rabbit' that live in Ezzo. Gift from a fashion-based guild in Akiba, it provides no defense, but it is very popular amongst females. Elissa has to take care of it because it is obvious when white clothing is dirty.

Chapter 5: Raid Battle

Part 1

A man writhed in the darkness.

He slowly stretched his bones and body.

The sound of flowing sewage came from somewhere unseen. This was a sewer, but it was different from the sewers of modern Tokyo or the old world. This zone, used exclusively by this man, only had streams of water thinner than fingers flowing through it, and was more like an underground dungeon.

There was a pile of stolen Adventurer clothing that served as a bed. The man sat up and touched his abdomen with his fingers. Dry blood stained his fingers like rust. Beneath his tattered black jacket, his burning wounds had mended.

He had probably made a full recovery.

The iron, mask-like helmet glowed dimly in the darkness. It was enchanted with a magical effect that gave him night vision.

The mobile suit was a relic passed down from an ancient era. It was more than a magical item or ancient technology; it was an artifact of the Precursors.

Its capability was beyond the technology of the People of the Land, the magic of the Adventurers, and even the Kunie Clan. It was the crystallization of the lost age.

The man looked over himself with his green-tinged sight.

He had made a full recovery.

The physical ability of the man was powerful. The mobile suit raised all physical traits of its user, especially stamina. In terms of HP, he had 3 times his survivability after equipping the armor. But it didn't boost the recovery rate of the user meaningfully. The armor wasn't designed with its user taking damage in mind. The defense of the armor was capable of negating most attacks; since they wouldn't get hurt, there was no need to boost their healing rate. Getting wounded merely highlighted the weakness of the armor, a grave insult to him.

But the mobile suit was not his only piece of equipment.

The tall and skinny man held 'Byamaru,' which rattled in its sheath. In his hand, it seemed rather short.

Whoever wielded this sword gained the power of the Hero of Ice Ridge, Lugrias. The more blood Byamaru drank, the more power the man could draw on. His biceps that had grown three times larger were proof of this. The sword rattling in its sheath was thirsting for more sacrifices.

He growled and left without a backwards glance.

The man didn't really see this place as his base. Just a quiet place for him to rest was good enough. This underground room was situated below a collapsed building. There was airflow, so this place was connected to the surface, but as far as the man knew there were no viable entrances or exits into it. He could teleport and wouldn't be inconvenienced at all, but it would take a lot of work for normal People of the Land or Adventurers to clear the rubble so they could reach it.

The scenery of Akiba came into the man's mind. This was the city he had guarded all these years. Although the Adventurers had been remodelling the buildings, the layout of the city remained the same.

The man moved to a certain teleport point he remembered.

The wind blowing across the land surrounded him suddenly.

The wind of this winter night hit the man, threatening to freeze his body. But the weather resistant function of the mobile suit allowed him to feel nothing. It was just a high class wine for the fine feast he was going to consume.

The man walked among the crumbling ruins and the deserted shopping streets.

Several dim lights lit up in the darkness. The man couldn't help smiling as he looked at these frail lights. He trembled with joy, and his slightly hunched upper body leaned ahead as far as it could as he licked his lips.

The bustle of the day faded away with the sun, and silence fell upon the city, like a young girl lying in the dark. She was an arrogant and strong woman in the day, but was frightened in the darkness of the night.

The tall and skinny man drew his sword.

The numbing breeze of winter flowed around him; it was no longer cold.

The man let out twisted laughter from the pleasure and pain of his body and soul crystallizing.

He was the winter. He was the numbing breeze.

The man took off his black jacket, as if he could not feel the strong, icy wind.

Illuminated by the lights of Akiba far below him, the figure of the man looked unbalanced. His skinny body was tough, but it didn't have a normal musculature. Wearing a tight tank top and leather shoes, only the man's extremities were covered by metallic armor, in the form of gauntlets and leg guards. The bulkiness of this armor made it look out of place on the man. Taking off his dirty jacket and landing like a giant bird on the streets, the man was a murderous weapon.

The metal sheathing enclosed grey fibers that could store mana and absorb impacts. The magical fibers took in power supplied by the city's magic circle, operating silently. Several protective barriers were created around his limbs and a force field was erected around him.

Memories of battles with titans in the freezing north awakened within him.

They were not the memories of this man, this Person of the Land.

They were the memories of the hero Lugrias.

As an Ancient, Lugrias had fought as one of the Knights of Izumo. In order to protect the smiles of the people of Susukino, he battled the evil titans for a hundred years. He drove the titans into the Jade Garden of Owl Mountain and was just a step away from sealing them forever. Such was the legacy of the hero Lugrias.

This intense pride ravaged the man's heart like a snow storm.

If the 'Daughter of the Spring Elm' Sutu Inaw hadn't betrayed him, if not for her treachery and her poison, Lugrias would not have died. Lugrias would still be revered by the people in the north as one of the immortal, eternal Ancients. But because of that frail girl...

With a chill that threatened to freeze everything, a wintery breeze spewed from the opening in the sheath. The magic blade called forth the man's rage, calling on him to release the carnage of the cursed frost.

The resentment of Lugrias howled, demanding that the people gather and kneel before him, to offer their lives to him.

The man shook his head.

He was not Lugrias.

He was a Person of the Land, one of the Kunie, a glorious guardian of Akiba. But he was not honored by the masses and was looked down upon as an automaton. Even though he was stronger than the Adventurers, at best he could be called a guardian; most of the people saw him as a guard dog that was just another piece of the city. As if he were an enslaved warrior of a defeated clan waiting to be sacrificed.

Because of his circumstances, a dark resentment burned in his heart. This hate intertwined with the freezing white wrath. That's right. The man was sure this was the reason Lugrias chose him.

In order to slay the human who betrayed him, the 'Daughter of the Spring Elm'.

The man leaped off the building without any hesitation. His legs smashed onto the ground. His barrier protected him from the damage of falling from the 6th floor. The ground throughout Akiba was not paved anyway, it was just black soil overgrown with roots and moss. The man stomped on the frozen and twisted branches and roots, and sensed the life force around the area was weak.

There was no prey.

The Murderer wondered if something was going on. Perhaps everyone had fled.

The Murderer had excellent combat capabilities, but he was not perfect and was bad at many things, scouting for enemies being one of them. The duty guards of the Kunie clan were on stand-by in the guard room after all. When they detected any crimes being committed, they would teleport to the scene directly using their mobile suits to apprehend the criminals.

Scouting for enemies was the function of the guard room, not an ability endowed to each individual guard. The ancient magical equipment mobile suits did not boost the ability of their users that respect.

The man's scanning radius was not enough to cover the whole of Akiba. But even so, the number of people moving around in Akiba tonight was too

low. Resting at night was normal in this world, but that was not so for Akiba. Maybe it was because of their endless stamina, the Adventurers slept much later than People of the Land. They were capable of fending off monsters lurking in the night as well.

That was why there should still be Adventurers wandering the streets deep into the night. The sacrifices the man presented to the blade were such people.

He couldn't sense any signs of life right now.

The man swung Byamaru around in frustration, releasing whirlwinds that froze the undergrowth. The man stepped on them, shattering them to pieces as he prowled north, searching for prey.

The teleport ability of the mobile suit was only effective within the city zone.

The magic circle built under the city powered the mobile suit. So if the Adventurers were to evacuate the city, he would not be able to follow.

The teleport ability couldn't work across zones.

Some closed off areas formed their own barriers known as zones. Take hotel rooms for instance. The small area that was filled with just 2 beds was its own zone because of the door, separated from the outside with magic. It was located within Akiba, but was not part of the Akiba city zone.

The magical facility known as the guild hall was the same. The many bases situated within the obsidian building were all separate zones. The buildings renovated by the Adventurers were also individual zones.

The man could not invade such zones by teleportation. Even if he wanted to walk in, the inherent magic of the zone could identify all visitors, filtering out unauthorized personnel.

That's why he couldn't prey on people hiding in these zones.

The man held his throat with one hand and let out a sinister laugh.

In other words, this was a defensive battle.

The Adventurers had admitted defeat and hidden before the might of the hero. The man laughed as he continued wandering the streets for prey. Peeking into alleys, destroying signboards, wielding the magic blade made

him happy. He might not agree, but these were the actions of a blood thirsty killer.

The man didn't have to wait long.

A petite figure stood in his way.

The man's mouth formed a crescent.

What a small and tender piece of meat.

The Murderer caught up to the small figure who smelled of spring oil. The frost blade howled in anticipation of its living meal. The wrath and hunger of the fallen hero spilled out across Akiba.

Part 2

Akatsuki braced herself as her weapon clashed with the Murderer's.

Her opponent was a monster, and there was no room for error. No, even without errors, there was a high chance Akatsuki would lose.

Akatsuki was not a member of a warrior class that was proficient in tanking the attacks of enemies, but was a weapon-based class that specialized in dealing damage.

For the role that Akatsuki was playing, she ranked number 3. What this meant was that there were 2 others who would be better suited to taking on the Murderer.

But half the reason Akatsuki was taking on the Murderer was coincidence. Akiba was 2 km wide, it was not extremely vast, but was in no way small. To handle this Murderer who might appear from anywhere, the surveillance network consisting of a raid party was too small. But they couldn't invest more manpower because of constraints.

The raid leader Rieze divided her forces into parties of 3-6 members, setting up a thin but wide surveillance network.

Another reason was Akatsuki's subclass and battle experience. The Tracker subclass gave Akatsuki the abilities to detect life signs, recon for enemies and perform wide area searches. Akatsuki's reconnaissance ability could match that of 4 parties, so it was not just a coincidence that Akatsuki found the Murderer.

Akatsuki attacked from the left quietly.

The silver flash of Quick Assault split the darkness of the night into upper and lower halves. Akatsuki knew this was not enough to kill the Murderer, and leaped forward with the attack. Quick Assault boosted the agility and leg strength of the user, so Akatsuki moved in search of a safe zone around the Murderer.

But the Kodachi she raised above the Murderer's back was knocked away by a chill that could freeze the bone.

Akatsuki expected this, but she still groaned from the pain, standing up after a forward roll.

She thought she had sneaked into a blind spot, but was knocked away by her foe.

"Akatsuki... Ah!"

Maryele, who was exposed to the ice storm, shielded her face. But a healing light shone on Akatsuki's back. This was Auto Healing magic. Like the healing pulse magic of Druids and the preventive magic of Kannagi, they were unique magics of each healing class.

The healing wave felt like the warm hands of Maryele supporting her. Akatsuki moved forward, twisting her body left and right to avoid the attacks.

In front of her was the alien killer she had lost to that day.

The central figure of the incident that must be defeated.

The man smiled smugly as he waited for Akatsuki to come at him. The imposing armor the man was wearing was a mobile suit... Or rather, a part of the suit. Akatsuki and the others already knew that its defensive capability rivaled that of phantasmal armor. But Akatsuki was not afraid.

The streets of Akiba turned into frozen land in the snow storm.

Looking at the other side of the road, Akatsuki thought about the building and walls that were the same as usual as she fought. The range of the snow storm was 5 meters, 10 meters at the most. The chill originated from the blade the Murderer was wielding.

Akatsuki dodged the new attack patterns she didn't experience last time as she thought about how to handle them. Understanding the enemy was the first thing Rieze had taught her. Observing your foe, separating the things you could do and the things you could not do. No matter how hard the battle became, never stop observing. Akatsuki followed this teaching closely.

But she couldn't stay on the defensive. Maryele was right behind her. Maryele was the leader of Crescent Moon Alliance with a bright smile, a friend of her lord. As a ninja and a player, Akatsuki couldn't let Maryele get hurt.

Maryele was a healer. The vanguard needed to hold off the enemy, allowing the healer to do her part. Even though Akatsuki was not a tank, she was the only one who could play that role, so she had to concentrate the hate of the opponent on her.

The intense emotions were strong enough to tear off her limbs.

Akatsuki suppressed her heart that wanted to swing her sword wildly.

Her first move was Accel Fang. She knew it didn't hit.

Following the momentum, she used Accel Fang again. It glanced off the gauntlet of the enemy, making a screeching sound and leaving the smell of burnt metal. Using the 2 Accel Fangs she cast along the same path as a feint, she lowered her body so much she was almost hugging the ground.

If it were the Akatsuki from before, she would have jumped upwards.

Wanting to increase her attack power, Akatsuki would want to gain the higher ground over her foes. But it was different this time. If Akatsuki moved close to the ground, the enemy's view would be blocked by his own limbs. The old Akatsuki would not be able to get over her inferiority complex and use it to attack.

All these were things given to Akatsuki by everyone.

Death Stinger broke through the Murderer's defense. The strike that hit the back of his knee unfortunately did not inflict any bad status effect. But the Murderer was slightly off balance. He used brute force to swipe out, while Akatsuki used her Kamahen-Tenmoku to block.

The sound of metal on metal reverberated in the night streets of Akiba.

Akatsuki, who was knocked back 5 meters, was sweating. Compared to the chill from the Murderer, the consecutive battle movements and tension made her temperature rise. Her hands hurt. When her blade clashed with the Murderer, Akatsuki supported the Kodachi with her right hand, even though she usually wielded it with just her left. She sensed that she couldn't defend the blow without using both hands.

She took some damage even when defending with both hands.

This couldn't be helped. According to the setting of Elder Tales, if the attack timing of 2 players matched, they would cancel each other out. But it was not something you could achieve easily, and you could only cancel out damage equivalent to your attack power. The stronger party would negate all damage, while the balance of the damage would be inflicted on the weaker party. The stronger attack of the Murderer hurt Akatsuki in their exchanges.

Even so, Akatsuki was still smiling.

Her arms that felt swollen recovered under the golden light. Auto Heal would activate when allies took damage, recovering their HP. The healing power could recover about 5 to 10 attacks. It was a great spell that automatically healed allies when they were hurt. For beginners to major raids like Akatsuki and Maryele, the psychological assurance of magic cast before battle was a huge advantage.

But this magic had a weak point. It activated after damage was dealt, meaning it couldn't stop fatal attacks, or powerful attacks that cut off an arm. Maryele's skill level in Auto Heal was lower than a cleric from D.D.D, so it was still far from total HP recovery even when it was used.

But Akatsuki ran forward anyway.

After somersaulting with an attack, she used Trick Step, twisting half a circle forcibly with her right leg, moving past her opponent with dazzling movements, and cast Paralyzing Blow.

Akatsuki kept attacking because she was not dead.

"Akatsuki!"

The Murderer landed another glancing blow. Akatsuki felt her iron armor ripping. That strike was a deadly storm passing through the top of Akatsuki's heart.

But Akatsuki was still alive.

Akatsuki's fighting spirit was burning. A week ago, she had to hide behind Soujirou to fight. The battle was not going well now, Auto Heal and normal healing spells were not enough to stop Akatsuki's HP from falling. But this was expected. The foe was the Murderer, a raid class enemy, not someone a member of a weak guild could take on after some preparation. Even the leader of West Wind Brigade, Soujirou, fell under his attack. Even with the time limit, Akatsuki had to handle this Murderer for some reasons. These reasons gave Akatsuki the strength to fight on.

Her hand that was extended forward was wearing a Star Gauntlet. This production grade gauntlet was made by the Pink Dice sisters. The gauntlet emitted a force field, its defense was higher than it looked, but it could not protect her against the snow. This time, the Black Feather Garb shone magically, creating space for Akatsuki to turn.

Akatsuki slid into the gap using her inherent agility and was thankful for the new defense equipment. The light and flexible gear gave her elemental defense and abilities several times stronger than in the past, but weighed about the same. These were all gifts from the tea party girls.

'- Can you use this?'

'- Is the size not right? Let me help you tailor it.'

'- You can eat the strawberry here, there is enough for everyone.'

'- I have a good ingredient here, fufufu.'

The smiling girls treated Akatsuki like a sister. Maybe half of their intention was to tease her, but they helped Akatsuki without reservation.

Most of the equipment protecting Akatsuki right now was gifted by them.

The durability of her old gear fell drastically after the battle with the Murderer and could not keep up with Akatsuki's new battle.

Akatsuki knew all the girls, but had not spoken to half of them. Akatsuki was not sure whether the girls knew about the Murderer and the crisis Akiba was facing, but they all encouraged Akatsuki and fed her snacks.

This spurred the familiar feelings of impatience and frustration in Akatsuki. This was her reflex, disliking people who treated her like a kid. But on the other hand, Akatsuki felt a soothing sensation.

Akatsuki was asking everyone for help, so in a sense, it was normal to be treated like a kid. Akatsuki decided to give up resisting, because she was not good enough. Looking for help was equivalent to admitting defeat.

But, whether she was not good enough or lost, there was still merit in this.

Akatsuki felt that there were some things you could only understand after admitting your own weakness.

The calmness in her heart was one of them.

Reflecting calmly like this, she would notice that the people talking to Akatsuki meant no harm. They were treating Akatsuki with pure kindness.

The people Akatsuki rejected with her bare fangs did not look down at her one bit.

It was an embarrassing experience, but not unbearable.

Akatsuki's swordplay became sharp.

She was not concerned with her dwindling HP.

She continued to attack, trying to inflict bad status effects on the Murderer and to slow him down. Instead of prolonging her life, Akatsuki was displaying the confidence she had with their strategy.

"10 more... 5!"

Maryele's shout made Akatsuki smile.

Speaking of which, this was a first for Maryele too.

The two of them were challenging the first major raid of their lives.

Part 3

Rieze relayed the contents to the other section team leaders after receiving the telepathic message.

"Target sighted, he is moving along the main road towards old Ogawa district on foot. Akatsuki's team made first contact. 2 woman team, 1 healer. D team move in to intercept, the rest stand by!"

Rieze shouted her command through telepathy while on the move.

The raid battle was finally starting.

Rieze sent out commands by telepathy consecutively. There were 24 Adventurers in Akiba right now, which would make 4 parties with 6 members each under normal circumstances. But Rieze didn't assign the members this way. Right now, the 23 members working under Rieze were split into groups of 2 or 3, forming about 10 groups.

Rieze was paired up with a partner. Behind her was Kyoko, a level 90 Guardian, one of the victims of the incident. Rieze herself was a Sorcerer.

This type of roster was weak. Even if team D linked up with Akatsuki, there would be only 4 members. It would be hard to take on an enemy on the level of a major raid boss.

Rieze and Kyoko who were situated in the canal headed for the main road running behind the railings. Unfortunately, they were far from the battle field, so they had to cut diagonally across Akiba. The distance was about 1 kilometer. But with the strong body of the Adventurers, they would arrive in 2 minutes.

The 2 of them went around the remnants of an old signboard, dashing through a trail covered with grass.

"Akatsuki..."

"Yes. Kyoko, are you okay?"

"Of course. To be frank, I am afraid of that guy. But I would rather fight him so Soujirou won't need to face him again. My athletic appearance is not just for show!"

"That's the spirit!"

"We have to win!"

Rieze didn't answer and just nodded firmly and ran. The people of Akiba had cleaned up the metro central square in the spirit of volunteerism. The 2 of them dashed across the place with strides as large as long jumpers and charged into the guild building, climbing up the stairs as if they had grown wings.

Rieze revised the battle plan while biting her lips.

The mysteries had been solved, there was no use for all his gimmicks.

The enemy was the undead warrior Lugrias.

No, he was someone who was similar to Lugrias.

In the 10th expansion pack 'Heart of Fantasy', he was the boss of the quest 'Glory of Days Past'. Glory of Days Past was a Full Raid quest, requiring 24 players to challenge, the difficulty was medium. It was hard in the beginning when information was lacking, but the difficulty went down after the trick to it became common knowledge. In the end, Glory of Days Past was just a quest that led to a bigger quest 'Prison of 9 Heroes', so it couldn't be too difficult.

The undead warrior Lugrias who should have died in the Ezzo Empire should be wandering around Hokkaido if he became a raid boss, so why was he attacking Akiba? Rieze didn't know, and there was no need to worry about the details. She was not interested in the cause. Rieze thought that studying the cause was only meaningful for the planning stage, and the only way to turn things around for unexpected events was through military maneuvers.

Rieze interviewed all the victims of the Murderer, and concluded that the Murderer was Lugrias, or someone with similar capability and character as Lugrias. It took so long because the Murderer wasn't able to use his skills fully or wanted to hide his abilities.

Another reason was that apart from being the raid boss Lugrias, he also possessed the power of the mobile suit. The monster used 2 different powers, which covered each other's tracks.

The key to solving the mystery was the Murderer's weapon Sentou-Byamaru.

The last person to fight the Murderer, Akatsuki, was certain.

To be honest, Kodachi were small and it was difficult to distinguish between weapons. Rieze was not confident in identifying the weapon by name just by seeing it. But since the girl using Kodachi said so, Rieze judged that this was reliable information.

The rest was elementary. The name Sentou-Byamaru reminded Rieze of the legacy of the hero who fought using this blade for Ezzo... Lugrias, as well as his fall to the dark side and the raid quest.

The cursed weapon.

It sounded exaggerated, but Sentou-Byamaru was a cursed weapon.

From the reports of Mikakage, Rieze learned that the flavor text was affecting the whole world. The grudges of the hero along with his wrath and hate were the flavor text of his trusted sword. The cursed text became reality, possessing the one who bore his sword.

(Ridiculous!)

Rieze bit her lip after feeling frustrated for the hundredth time. Flavor text becoming reality and affecting the user.

This was like a living nightmare, attempting to rip the dreamer apart and something that aroused the fear from within.

But Rieze had a mind capable of running the training corps of D.D.D, she thought of a strategy outside the domain of fear. If the Murderer had the abilities of Lugrias, his capability could be divided into 3 types.

The first was a huge increase in HP. The HP of Lugrias varied widely with the number of people within the zone. In the Glory of Days Past quest, when fighting him in the underground tomb, there were 50 People of the Land prisoners captured by him in the same zone. Just with this, Lugrias' HP was 3 times his minimum HP.

If Akiba was as lively as ever, his HP would probably be several hundred times larger, and even West Wind Brigade or D.D.D couldn't take this monster down.

That's why Rieze came up with a plan. She and Henrietta who was not here right now issued a strict warning. Just like the quest featuring Lugrias, they needed to escort the People of the Land out of the zone to seek refuge, so Akiba would become a zone with just them around. This was the minimum requirement to fight Lugrias.

Another thing was an increase of stats with the number of people around him. Lugrias would increase his attack, evasion, defense and accuracy with the number of Adventurers within 50m of him. This was one of the secrets to why Lugrias could defeat Soujirou, and the reason why Rieze was spreading her forces out so thin.

It was the same with the quest Glory of Days Past. Leaving the strongest party of 6, the other 18 members would fend off the evil spirits summoned

by the grudge of Lugrias and escort the People of the Land to safety. By weakening Lugrias this way, they would be able to defeat him.

The last ability was the frost area attack. Lugrias would conjure a snowstorm in front of him, obscuring visibility and dealing freeze damage. It was a simple ability, and could only be defended by equipping elemental defense gear.

'The more living people that are around him, the stronger he gets, freezing all those alive'. This was the flavor text describing Lugrias' grudge after dying.

He was not a simple enemy from the field or dungeon zones, but a quest boss with flavor text, that's why he possessed such abilities.

These 3 abilities were the secret behind Lugrias, and the reason why the difficulty of this battle was at the level of despair. A medium level 90 raid became a terrible force in Akiba that was full of living souls.

Especially when combined with the instant teleport ability of the mobile suit.

Lugrias could make his escape anytime. He could also strike at a time and place with a lot of Akiba citizens. The Murderer stalked the streets of Akiba at night, but there was no telling how long he would continue. Maybe the reason was because the quest was set at night, or it may be the preference of the Murderer, it could also be a coincidence.

Rieze considered the worst case scenario.

She worried that the Murderer who possessed the abilities of Lugrias might no longer be an NPC. The witness testimony stated that the Murderer was called Enbart Nelles, a Samurai. This meant that apart from being cursed, he also had a human mind with the ability to learn.

Raid quests were the contents of the game. The difficulty was high enough to wipe out the players, but the developers only set the bar high in order for the players to have a sense of accomplishment when they succeeded in the challenge. Rieze understood this because she had joined the largest battle guild in Yamato. The players who enjoyed challenging raids had a relationship of enigmatic trust with the game developers.

But this was no longer a game called Elder Tales, and Rieze and the others were not game characters. This raid might not be beatable anymore. There was a big possibility that this was the case.

Would this possibility increase in the future? The Murderer would learn of Rieze's battle plan just by fighting them once, and he might adapt with more cunning and deadly attacks. The teleport capability and the abilities of Lugrias were a perfect combination and with the combination of these two, Rieze could only imagine the hell that would follow.

Rieze came up with a countermeasure with a good chance of success.

But even so, there was no telling if it would work.

The world after the Catastrophe was no longer a game, there was no guarantee that any plans would work. Rieze felt a chill when she realized this. Just turning this thought into words made Rieze shiver as if an ice demon had grabbed her spine.

The title of tactician and the glory of leading the training corps didn't mean a thing out here.

They only increased Rieze's insecurities. Because any mistakes made by Rieze who was holding such a position would cost others their lives.

Rieze pushed her tired legs forward.

How terrifying. Rieze had finally reached the terrifying stage where she couldn't take responsibility if she troubled others. Rieze recalled that silver haired princess. She had known such fear since birth, but even so, she still barged into the lords' conference and came to Akiba on a griffon with Rieze's lord. Rieze held her in reverence.

That princess was incredible.

Krusty too. Shiroe as well. The 11 guild masters also. Including Akatsuki.

Trying to change things with no guarantee of success, what a terrifying thing. Rieze felt embarrassed to have derided them as middle school girls exchanging diaries. She was only talking on her high horse from a safe position.

Rieze felt shamed from her ugliness. But all the more reason for her to not back down.

There were 9 contingencies for this battle. Rieze instructed others to make adjustments when the situation called for it. But her inability to narrow down the plan to just 1 was proof of her incompetence as a tactician.

But this was better than failure.

"We are here!"

Kyoko barged through the metal door which led to the night sky with a bright moon. The debris of the columns lay around her feet, the evergreen trees blocked half her vision. Far below them was the central square before the metro station.

This place where the wind howled was the black obsidian fortress that was the pride of Akiba... the 15 story guild building. The high rise building had a roof that looked like it had been smashed by a punch from a titan.

"Careful Miss Rieze!"

The chilling wind lifted Rieze's cape. Rieze tightened her clothes while Kyoko held on to her belt, the two of them hid behind the pillars.

Rieze opened her telepathy menu and prepared for the next step of the battle together with Kyoko.

Part 4

In an unknown basement of the same guild building, a different kind of battle was coming to a conclusion.

The faded wallpaper together with the indirect illumination created an atmosphere akin to the deep sea during the night. Raynesia gulped when she recalled the maze that led to this drawing room. It was impolite for a princess, but there was no stopping the relentless fearful emotions that kept rising up.

She had seen all kinds of aristocrats.

Although she thought they were troublesome, she had never felt so uneasy before. For the first time, she understood what it was like to be overwhelmed not by the content of the conversation, but the atmosphere of the place. An eerie atmosphere seemed to have overwhelmed her, different from the fear her grandfather or Krusty gave her.

She realized her hands resting on her thighs were grabbing a handkerchief tightly and relaxed.

She even wanted to rely on this thin piece of cloth.

A warm hand rested on Raynesia's shoulders. It was Henrietta, one of the talented ladies that was the pride of Akiba. The touch that eased Raynesia made her want to turn around to give her thanks, but her will stopped her.

Her priority was to converse with the man sitting on the couch opposite her... Kinjyou.

The leader of the Kunie was wearing a barely visible smile with a relaxed attitude. It made Raynesia feel the Kinjyou who apologized in a straightforward manner in the Water Maple Consulate was a complete fantasy.

He was not fearless, nor was he taunting.

Raynesia believed this was Kinjyou's true expression. Maybe his attitude the previous time they met was all an act. Elissa also criticized Raynesia this way all the time. Raynesia didn't want to point this out at this place, but her feelings remained tense.

"Are you sure you want to stop the magic circuit between the magic circle and the mobile suit?"

"I am certain."

Raynesia answered.

She had been repeating this request since she set foot in the underground residence of the Kunie clan. Kinjyou had already agreed. The Kunie clan serfs wearing black tops were definitely starting the process.

The query this time was probably the final confirmation.

"Stopping the supply of magic means the magic barrier protecting the city will be lost, and restarting the system will take 10 years."

Raynesia nodded her head in response to Kinjyou's questioning eyes.

"Yes, I understand."

"The guard system protecting Akiba will be down."

"Yes."

"This city will be defenseless."

"That's right."

Raynesia answered smoothly.

If anyone asked if she had reservations... there certainly were.

This was expected. Even at this moment in time where she was pretending to be calm, her heart was already regretting and at the verge of tears.

(Why me?) She thought.

(Why is this happening?) She wondered.

If she could escape, she would run no matter how much she had to apologize.

This was only natural.

But she steeled her heart and made this request.

Thinking back, she realized why Kinjyou visited her that day.

The reason behind the young man's visit was to transfer the burden of making this decision to Raynesia. He left with the smile he was wearing right now after dumping the responsibility on Raynesia. This was the best course of action for him.

Raynesia thought that was despicable, and hoped he didn't resort to that. This was the mistake of the Kunie clan this time, shouldn't they make the decision and bear the responsibility? Raynesia thought the Kunie clan should resolve the matter immediately and compensate the city.

Even though the matter was not so simple, Kinjyou should have made the decision to stop the magic supply as the person in charge. If the people were not satisfied with this incident, he should let the citizens stone him... Raynesia had thought about that before.

But thinking carefully, this was the same course of action Raynesia wanted to take.

When Raynesia found out about this, she wanted to contact her grandfather Duke Sergead, or complain about this to Krusty. But wasn't

that dumping the responsibility on them? Raynesia was sure she never did that before. Wrong, Raynesia had always been doing that.

Kinjyou was very similar to Raynesia.

But after that, the girl in black charged into the city.

Here was what Raynesia thought back then.

'Ah, that worked out in my favor.'

If the masses knew about this incident, there would be a standoff between the Adventurers and People of the Land. Raynesia, as the daughter of the Corwen family, had to prevent this from happening. But on the other hand, when she was at a loss, the Adventurer girl came to her aid and shone a path leading to the resolution of the crisis. By overhearing the news, this girl had pushed the development of the events before she could make any decision.

For a moment, Raynesia definitely thought this way.

That's why Raynesia noticed. The way Kinjyou pushed the responsibility to Raynesia was just like Raynesia who had been pushing her responsibility away since birth. The frustration Raynesia was feeling against this young man was actually directed at herself.

Raynesia had discussed this incident with Rieze and Henrietta, who in turn reported it to the Round Table Council. But the one making the decision was Raynesia. She couldn't push the responsibility from Kinjyou to the Round Table Council. Not just because she was unhappy to be put in such a position.

Kinjyou was a Person of the Land, Raynesia was also a Person of the Land. That's why she couldn't dump this responsibility to the Adventurers.

Adventurers were a different kind of existence from People of the Land.

To be honest, the People of the Land were a weak existence compared to the Adventurers. But that was why there was a line they would not back away from. If they pushed away their duties because of weakness, that meant they were worse than just being frail. That way, there would be no way they could work together... and become friends.

Elissa's words rang in Raynesia's ears.

Raynesia let go of all pretense and stared at Kinjyou.

"This incident is not just the fault of the Kunie clan, but the mistake of the People of the Land as a whole. We overlooked this due to our lack of vigilance. We have to face this fact. I conclude that the best course of action we can take right now is to stop the magic supply."

"..."

"In order to apologize to all the Adventurers, we have to do our part. What we can do right now is to stop the magic circle."

"It might cause even more trouble."

Raynesia had no reply to this criticism.

This was expected. The impact this incident caused could not be shouldered by Raynesia alone. Wrong, this decision would gamble the irreplaceable lives of many people, so who could shoulder this burden? Raynesia wanted to say 'God can do it'. But those were just useless words.

But being a noble meant taking up this heavy responsibility.

The aristocrats had to show their courage even when facing the risk of death.

Her grandfather had always shown Raynesia through his example.

Just like the belief in God, this teaching was intangible, but was a truth that Raynesia could touch in her heart. Raynesia nodded her head stiffly. Her movement lacked grace and looked ugly.

"Please do not worry."

But Henrietta standing behind Raynesia spoke encouragingly. Wearing the official uniform of a Round Table representative with a flowing cape, Henrietta said in a clear voice:

"The Round Table Council already knows about this incident, please take note that we also agree to stopping the magic circle."

"So you have the backing of the Round Table..."

"Not a backing. Just fellow residents of Akiba working together to resolve the issue. I also consider the Kunie clan to be residents of Akiba... Am I wrong?"

"Is that what Mr Shiroe told you to say?"

"No."

Raynesia could tell that Henrietta had tensed up.

Raynesia didn't understand the meaning behind this exchange, but she glared at Kinjyou with unrelenting resolve.

"... I understand. No matter how this incident came about, the Kunie clan were still negligent in our security. This will leave a stain in our proud history of using the magic barrier to protect the city for several hundred years. We were distracted from the calamity coming from the other continents, and underestimated the threat from the west, it is all my fault."

"... Mr Kinjyou?"

Raynesia couldn't understand the words of the young man who was bowing before her. These enigmatic words gave her some premonition, but it slipped away from her grasp.

(Because this man... the Kunie clan are different in some ways from the People of the Land...)

"Like you said, we have to do the things we can do. Not to reject, but to take a step forward. I am sorry lady Raynesia, I did something akin to testing you this time. Allow me to owe you a favor for this incident."

Kinjyou raised his head with a sincere expression. This was an expression Raynesia saw for the first time. But he reverted to his enigmatic smile and announced: "But, I want to let someone else return the favor."

It seemed like Kinjyou was testing her.

Raynesia finally understood. Their last meeting was a test for Raynesia. Raynesia understood this without knowing the objective and the result. This troubled her. Even if Raynesia was not suitable, Kinjyou in front of her, the mind reading monster, the white glasses demon, all of them attempted to force Raynesia to shoulder this heavy burden.

"The preparations are done."

Kinjyou announced after his clansman whispered in his ear.

In response, Raynesia turned around and looked at Henrietta for the first time. The talented lady with blonde hair and glasses had a far away look and muttered a few words.

"10 more... 5... understood, in one minute."

Henrietta ended the telepathy and nodded. After the confirmation, Raynesia said in a clear voice:

"Alright, I will request formally. Please stop the magic circuit supply to the defenses of Akiba city."

One minute later, ripples similar to a sigh of a titan spread across Akiba. The renowned invincible guard system ceased operation.

Part 5

"10 meters... 5 meters.... contact!"

A cute voice rang out on the street.

A giant stone body appeared which was avoided easily by Akatsuki who seemed to preempt its arrival. The grey granite golem raised its arms as thick as a car and smashed downwards.

The Murderer was uncertain whether he could take the blow and dodge. The attack of the golem was wide and ignored defenses, but the speed was horrible so it could be avoided easily.

But this was within Akatsuki's calculations.

After the Murderer avoided the golem's attack, Akatsuki aimed for his flank and used Fatal Ambush. This skill that had the word ambush in it had a long casting time, and would take some effort to hit a fast opponent. With the golem's attack as a cover, she cast this skill from the Murderer's blind spot.

She was rewarded with damage to the Murderer for pulling off this high difficulty attack.

Akatsuki twisted her body to avoid the raging attacks and snowstorm. She avoided by a mere 10 cm. This distance was not enough to avoid the area attack of the snowstorm, but this was where the golem came in again. Akatsuki hid behind the giant and waited for the storm to disperse.

But the price was the golem freezing with cracking sounds.

The golem boasted high HP similar to its appearance, but that was relative to the other familiars that could be called forth by the Summoner. This type of familiar level summon only had a third the power of Adventurers of similar levels, so its HP was also one third. Even though the golem was tough and sturdy, its HP was less than that of Akatsuki.

But it still endured the Murderer's attack for 5 seconds, and 5 seconds was enough for Akatsuki and the others to make their next move.

"Heartbeat Healing... Hoi~"

Mikakage raised her staff that resembled a broom, casting the unique healing spell of the Druids from the hood of an abandoned car. Bright green light protected Akatsuki's heart with a pulsing sound, and Akatsuki's strength returned gradually with each beat of the rhythm.

The tiny girl Ellie with the same appearance and movement as Mikakage was also casting her magic by Mikakage's feet. Plant fairy Alraune could assist in battles just like other minions, and had the special ability of boosting the recovery effects of the Summoner's spell. The introverted Ellie shut her eyes as she waved her spoon. She was not scared, she was just giving her all to aid her master.

Healing over time spells with wide area recovery spell and instant recovery spell... Mikakage cast all her magic on Akatsuki. Using multiple healing spells was the unique style of the druids, Mikakage healed Akatsuki's wounds without reservation. Without regards to her MP, Mikakage healed Akatsuki's HP to 80%.

Akatsuki didn't thank her. She didn't have the effort to spare.

Akatsuki's duty right now was to attract the Murderer's attention and run down the main street. Completing her task perfectly was the only way to show her gratitude. Akatsuki, in her most focused mental state ever, understood this point.

Akatsuki's range of awareness spread out, becoming as clear as the water surface, grasping the situation in her surroundings.

Maryele, who was running right behind her, continued to cast Auto Heal to keep its effect from lapsing. A guerrilla Monk and her Cleric partner who were participants from West Wind Brigade joined them.

Akatsuki leaped away from the Monk's direction when she felt a burning sensation on her skin.

The Summoner Byako who called forth the earlier golem conjured a Lance Damsel from a big magic circle. A fairy wearing pure white female armor threw a spear of light that split into 7. Akatsuki recalled it was a variation of the 'Combat Summon: Sword Princess'. This was the strongest attack magic of the Summoner, but it didn't inflict fatal wounds on the Murderer. This was expected. Even though the attack was powerful, a raid boss would not go down from a single attack. But the consecutive attacks were strong enough to pierce through a boulder.

Akatsuki's team dashed through the duo who kept on using attack and healing spells... the zone where Mikakage and Byako were stationed. She couldn't stop because Akatsuki's team's duty was to lure the Murderer to the designated point. The duo would run out of MP in 2 minutes at this rate of spell casting.

"Good luck!"

A cheerful encouragement that didn't suit the intense battlefield rang out. Behind the Murderer who was pressing in with a looming smile, Mikakage was waving her hands so hard that they might fall off. Akatsuki felt a warmth in her heart. This was definitely not because of Heartbeat Healing.

"Update! 10 more meters!"

The voice of Maryele came from behind. Akatsuki leaped through the sky as if she were flying to the moon. After passing through 'Mikakage and Byako station', there were 10 more meters to the next one. This was like visiting several attraction sites of a winter parade. Lugrias' abilities would increase with the number of Adventurers within 50 meters, which was why they could only station limited people within this range.

If the battle dragged on, the limited manpower would exhaust their MP eventually. The damage output of the limited manpower was weak, so the battle would definitely drag on, so they couldn't increase the MP usage rate. It was a vicious cycle.

In order to break this stalemate, Rieze came up with this raid battle plan. Stationing several 50 meter spherical zones that didn't overlap in Akiba. A team centered around Akatsuki would lure the Murderer through the zones, while the members stationed in each area would provide support with covering fire and healing spells.

Akatsuki thought about the zones that were left and continued running.

She swore to keep running until day broke.

Akatsuki noticed that the support from Maryele had been dwindling. Akatsuki, who was a weapon specialist class, adjusted the way she fought depending on her remaining MP. At worst, this would lead to lower damage output and the battle dragging longer. But it was not the same for the healer class Maryele. If Maryele held back on her healing support, it would directly result in Akatsuki's demise.

Because of this huge responsibility, Akatsuki wanted to protect everyone, she didn't want to lose. Akatsuki's equipment, the magic protecting her, healing her, all these didn't belong to Akatsuki.

In order to pay back these borrowed treasures, she kept on dashing ahead.

A gear inside Akatsuki fell into place.

Lowering her center of gravity and holding her breath. The image she drew from her heart when assuming this pose became a trigger for a skill. This was the unique skill of Trackers, Sneak. It usually required the use of the game menu to activate it, but Akatsuki could call forth the technique with her body movements alone through practice.

Her presence dissipated from her body clad in black, as if her life force itself was gone. The 'presence' of Akatsuki right now was very vague.

Akatsuki didn't know her location, but she could see the attack from the demon blade clearly from her fixed field of vision. Akatsuki was exposed in front of the dangerous attack, but there was another Akatsuki watching from another position. Her Sneak was at the level of Shadow Lurk, her separated life force advanced in a straight line on the battlefield.

Akatsuki dodged past the ice storm like attack of the Murderer.

The body that looked like Akatsuki and Akatsuki's consciousness were in different places.

The evidence was the shining body of Akatsuki swaying in the ice storm, negating all attacks like illusions.

Akatsuki reached the back of the Murderer enduring the overwhelming sense of acceleration.

She couldn't keep this up much longer.

She could only activate this special skill by holding her breath and calming her heart. The skill used for infiltration missions or escaping from monsters was forcibly applied on the battlefield. This was the Overskill Akatsuki learned.

... Boring.

Akatsuki wielded her blade like a sparrow.

The sudden attack from behind cut into the throat of the Murderer slightly. Even attacking with the illusion just now, he still managed to evade a fatal hit, the demon blade was formidable indeed.

... Boring.

Akatsuki did not feel the joy of achieving her wish. She stopped her breath and activated Shadow Lurk again. The shadow copies that appeared immediately confused the Murderer and helped Akatsuki evade the triple strike and leap backwards.

Large icicles formed with the strikes, but Akatsuki ignored the flying ice attack and continued to accelerate, dancing on the blade of the Murderer.

This Overskill was similar to the demon blade.

Its usage was against the common sense of Elder Tales.

The strength Akatsuki desired was similar to the crazy demon that created snow storms. She felt ashamed for her naivety of wanting such powers.

With a pulsing green light in her breast and a golden shine around her body.

The gauntlets on her hands were full of power while the black garb on her body shielded her from harm.

Most importantly, the hands waving at Akatsuki so hard as if they were going to fall off... the cheers, the gentle nods of encouragement warmed Akatsuki's heart and body.

Overskill was understanding the Elder Tales game system, after the changes of the Catastrophe, a state you reached after working hard on it. It was part ingenuity and part hard work. In the end, Akatsuki didn't learn any of the 8 Overskills D.D.D discovered and was taught to her by Rieze. Just

like Nyanta's cooking was the combination of his Chef subclass and his real life cooking skills, all the Overskills were the observation and research of the subject in question.

It was not something you could use after hearing its explanation.

It was not something you could gain instantly after levelling up in a game.

Overskill was not something you could get just by wishing for it, it was something you achieved after going through hard work and thinking.

Nazuna said 'daring to say that Overskill is boring is the real Overskill'. Akatsuki carved these words into her heart. Overskills were not used by high level Adventurers to flaunt their strength, it was something more precious, a piece of something she touched that day.

Akatsuki ran in order to express this, cutting off her naive thinking of wanting power. No matter what she had to go through, she had to destroy that demon blade.

The secret behind Akatsuki's Overskill Shadow Lurk was the skill of the Tracker subclass Sneak. This skill that couldn't be used in combat was forcibly utilized by Akatsuki after the Catastrophe. Combining it with Road Mirage and Trick Step, she could create clones of herself. This was something Akatsuki created, wings that only belonged to Akatsuki.

Even with all the buff magic and support, Akatsuki still couldn't match up to the Murderer. The Murderer breathed out an air of insanity triggered by the smell of blood, suppressing Akatsuki in this duel with brute strength.



(... Have to pull away by using a skill.)

After determining her strategy, Akatsuki used Stealth Blade that increased attack penetration in her attempt to get away from the tall and lanky man. The Murderer who had seen this attack several times would dodge to the left, giving Akatsuki the chance to back away. But...

"Is that it? Is that it?"

The Murderer allowed the blade to cut into his flank and smiled with glee. The Murderer, who drew closer at the expense of losing HP, let out a hellish chill. The snow storm solidified in an instant, freezing his wounds along with Akatsuki's beloved blade.

Akatsuki lost her only weapon and fell to the ground from a blow from her opponent's arm.

Part 6

"I'm okay."

Akatsuki stood up.

Her momentary lapse left her on the brink of death, with less than 5% of her HP left. But she was still alive.

Maryele rushed over and used healing spells with mediocre effect. Her MP was running out.

"I'm sorry. I'm... really sorry."

The sad voice of Maryele pained Akatsuki's heart. Maryele did nothing wrong. This was her first raid battle but she had to bear the burden of being the primary healer because she was partnered with Akatsuki. Akatsuki wanted to console Maryele, but she couldn't find the words to say. So Akatsuki put all her heart into the same reply.

"I'm okay."

These were words of bravado, but not bravado at the same time. It was from the bottom of her heart wishing the person she cared about not to worry. Akatsuki was not sure whether her message was conveyed and prepared to dash ahead. At this moment, a short stick like object spun in the air towards her.

"Just in time, take this."

The 25th girl who stuck her head out of the workshop said as she lifted her goggles.

The sheath of the sword she received was still warm. In the hands of Akatsuki, who was freezing in the snow storm, it radiated a warmth of a fresh birth.

"... Meito-Haganemushi"

"Wrong... it's 'Haganemushi-Tatara', reforged version."

With a closer look, Akatsuki found that the length and the hilt were different, it was made to accommodate Akatsuki. Most importantly, the status screen that reflected the item's background... the flavor text was different.

"Something this great, I can't afford it..." "Win with this."

Akatsuki was on the verge of tears, but Amenona's sword smith Tatara interrupted her. It was not her usual lazy voice, but a determined tone.

"Defeat him with my sword."

In the battle field she was pointing at, the guerilla from West Wind Brigade, Kawara, was battling.

She was covered in wounds and blood all over, but she was still fighting with a fierce roar. The Murderer's primary target was Akatsuki, and he was still looking at her. But the young girl was using the skills of a Monk to defend Akatsuki, who was knocked down by the Murderer.

"Akatsuki, the preparations are complete."

Akatsuki nodded at Maryele who was using healing spells. It was time.

There was no need for words.

Akatsuki dashed like an arrow in a straight line. She sent her Shadow Lurk clone out to attack with Accel Fang, using her brand new Kodachi. The Murderer's Sentou-Byamaru clashed with Haganemushi-Tatara. In the storm of grinding metal, Akatsuki's clone deformed and faded.

Akatsuki appeared behind the Murderer and struck at his head with Venom Strike. The man deflected the poisonous blow with a flick of his head, twisting his body forcibly to strike at Akatsuki, who was in midair.

This blow would definitely be fatal if it landed, but Akatsuki did a double jump in the air to avoid it. Reinforcements were here.

"Getting careless towards the end, just like Shiroe!"

Nazuna dashed in like a bullet.

Wearing thick sole wooden sandals, she elegantly somersaulted in air, running beside Akatsuki away from the demon blade. Nazuna probably felt eyes looking at her and softened her expression, but her eyes were still focused.

"Alright then, since you are Shiroe's junior, that means you are my junior too. To keep Soujirou from worrying, allow me to assist!"

Akatsuki nodded.

The Murderer charged at them like a tank. Rounding the corner of the main street, they ran towards a narrow gap between 2 buildings. Akatsuki and the fox ear beauty dashed in. The snow storm blowing into the alley was stopped by Nazuna's barrier magic.

"Are you alright?"

The gentle voice showing no signs of being chased by a monster made Akatsuki raise her head. "Why are you crying?" Nazuna teased with a gentle smile. Akatsuki wiped her tears, but she couldn't say the words 'I'm fine.' She was so happy.

She was at the brink of death and being chased by a fearsome foe, but Akatsuki didn't feel the fear of losing something. Surrounded by her friends, Akatsuki was challenging a raid. For the first time, she felt the warmth and camaraderie of battling together.

Right now, the streets of Akiba at night were a battle field.

The stage for Akatsuki, Raynesia and the girls of the Water Maple Consulate.

These feelings eclipsed the longing Akatsuki had for Shiroe. Akatsuki really liked the excellent and intelligent young man she revered as her lord, but

she was now confident of liking him more. Preparing for others was a honorable path. Making a place for others to smile was very difficult. Her lord who understood the difficulty and value of this was worthy of Akatsuki's love.

"Contact!"

This shout made Nazuna and Akatsuki jump up. Countless lightning arrows flew towards the Murderer through the narrow passage. Compared to Akatsuki who fought with multiple skill usage and attacks from blind spots, Assassins who specialized in sniping with Assassinate dealt more damage.

Nazuna and Akatsuki ran in the air, leaving behind the enemy howling insanely while chasing them. There were several translucent watery footholds 5cm in diameter under their feet. This is Nazuna's Overskill, Skywalker.

This was using the basic Kannagi spell Purification Barrier and setting it up freely somewhere. The magic barrier used to intercept damage was cast at a space of Nazuna's choosing. This small force field that couldn't intercept any significant damage was the creative use of protective magic for movement, creating a foothold in midair.

The place they arrived at after the frantic run was the central square of Akiba. The Akiba metro, the elevated tracks, railings and buildings surrounded this place, which was known as the heart of Akiba. After reaching this place, Akatsuki turned around in the pitch black building and prepared for battle, waiting for the Murderer to come.

The deep breaths of the chilly winter air hurt Akatsuki's chest. Her lungs hurt from the cold, but cooled Akatsuki's head.

The Murderer noticed that Akatsuki had stopped and moved slowly into the square with loud steps. Akatsuki was left with 20% HP, it was about the same for the Murderer. Although their actual value differed by a hundred fold, Akatsuki still lifted her sword and awaited the Murderer.

This was the Straight Eyes stance Akatsuki had used tens of thousands of time since the Catastrophe.

"Not running?"

Akatsuki nodded to acknowledge the question the Murderer asked with a cramping smile.

"Then, it's about time..." The murderer charged in as he shouted "to die!". He lifted Byamaru above his head, the sword growing larger with its ice coating, ready to strike. The 2 swords that were about the same size when displayed in Anemona differed widely now, it was like comparing a branch to a tree trunk.

But from the skies far above, water akin to a waterfall fell, splashing the lifted Byamaru.

Akatsuki could see in her mind the comrades surrounding the central square. Her wide area enemy detection ability provided her with this intel. If the others wandered within 50 meters of the Murderer, all their efforts would be in vain. 50 meters was longer than the range of all healing and attack spells. This meant her comrades could not take part in the battle.

But there was a blind spot.

A place higher than 15 stories, a place slightly above 50 meters.

With Kyoko acting as a safety harness, Rieze was barely within Akatsuki's detection range. The sorcerer's wide area attack, Freezing Rain, used a flood of water with ice particles in it to wash away the enemies. If she used it in a dungeon, the range was only 20 meters. But the water was falling freely under gravity towards the enemy right now.

This attack absorbed the freezing chill of the Murderer, feeding off the cold and solidifying the moment it touched him.

"What...!"

The Murderer tried to turn and escape, but his lower limbs and his gauntlet holding his sword were encased in a pillar of ice. His plan to split Akatsuki backfired, leaving Byamaru that he was holding in his hand protruding out at the top of the ice pillar.

The damage from the spell was insignificant, less than 1% of his total health. But he was trapped in a stupendous amount of ice, restricting his movements, making it hard for him to evade attacks. The Murderer was unwilling to compromise and struggled in vain. He was really stunned by this turn of events now.

He didn't know why, but even Raynesia, who exited from the guild building, was staring at him.

It had nothing to do with his remaining HP.

Luring the Murderer here was to sap him of his combat prowess. Letting him see through all the tactics so he would let down his guard. The tactician with curly hair used the powers of the Murderer against him, trapping him in place. Akatsuki approached him deftly.

Her first attack was a simple Deadly Dance. Akatsuki lowered her centre of gravity and slashed upwards. This was a melee attack skill, not powerful, but had a short cool down of 1 second. And its damage increased with each consecutive successful strike.

Akatsuki hit the exposed Byamaru as if she were forging a blade.

Meitou had the ability of lowering the durability of your opponent's weapon, a tradable weapon acquired from a major raid. It was best used for player versus player battles, an outstanding Kodachi with the capability of destroying an opponent's weapon. Meitou-Haganemushi had now been reforged into Haganemushi-Tatara. It might not be phantasmal level, but it was the strongest weapon Akatsuki had ever used. But the thing fuelling Akatsuki's fighting spirit was not the attack power of the weapon.

Something more intangible, simple and important was protecting Akatsuki.

The sword smith of Anemona Tatara reforged this blade just for this quiet friend of hers. 'May this serious and righteous girl never fall to the wrong path; may both the sword and the girl support each other, to fight against evil curses and the suffering of the world.'

The meaningless flavour text meant to provide the background of the item warmed Akatsuki.

These words contained meaning, emotions, history, relations and legacy.

They were not meaningless.

In the heart of the reader, it was irreplaceably important since the very beginning. Because it was irreplaceable, the tragedy was triggered by the Murderer and Akatsuki found redemption.

In the blue light of the coming dawn, the strong sound of sword strikes reverberated in the surroundings.

The sparrow who found her home focused on swinging her sword over 20 times.

Even in the morning before the sun was visible, Akatsuki and her comrades believed they would emerge victorious.

Mikakage, Azukikomo, Henrietta, Maryele and Rieze, who seemed to have bumped her nose somewhere, and Kyoko, who was hugging Raynesia in her arms, were all watching the moment the cursed blade shattered. They gasped as the Murderer collapsed to the ground sluggishly.

There were no cheers of victory, just the sighs and sounds of relief. The girls gathered at the central square looked at each other and smiled sheepishly. Everyone showed their weak side and relied on others. A lot of the girls made blunders too.

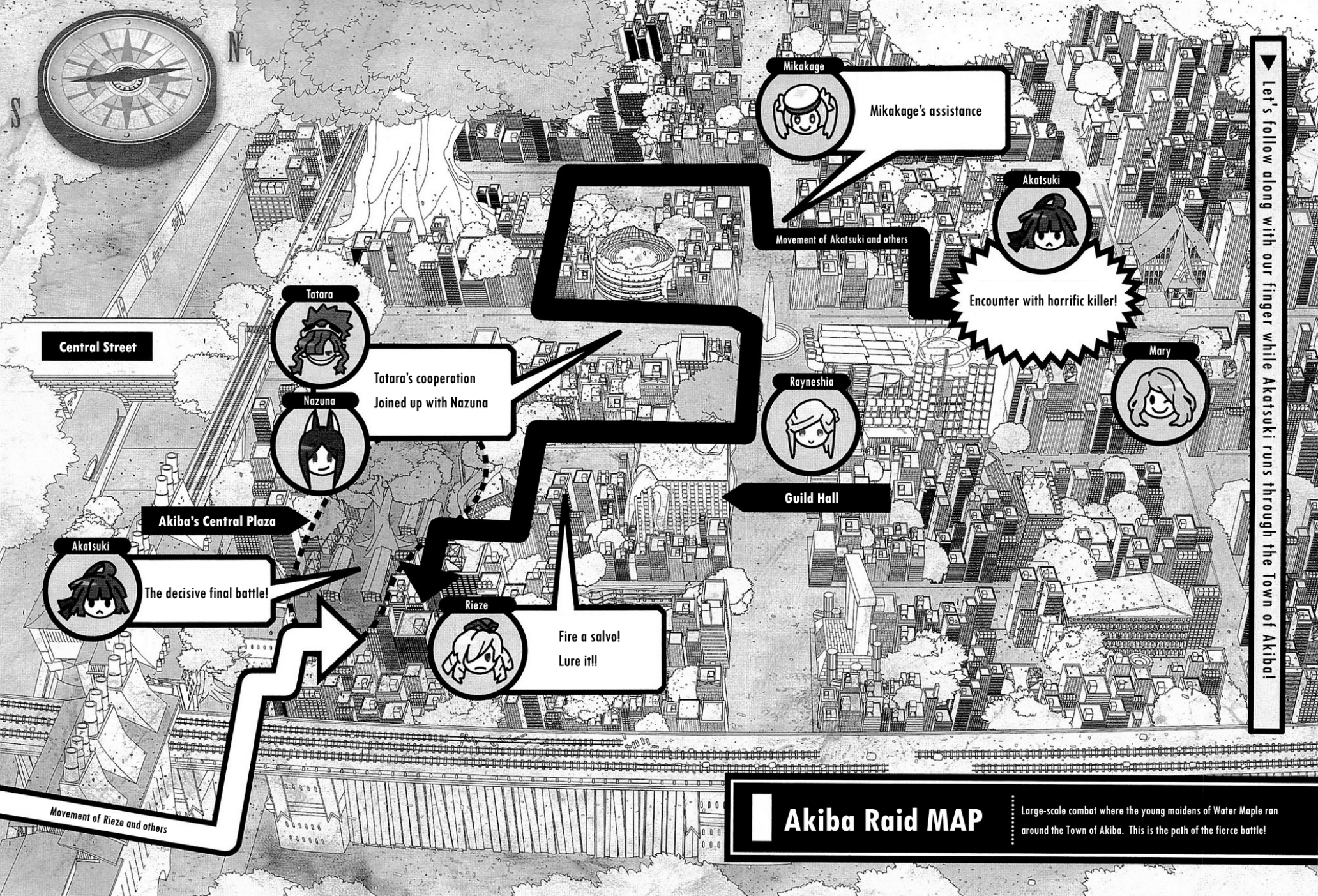
But this was the first real battle of the girls of Water Maple Consulate.

The small and modest raid group completed their mission successfully.

Their victory was the bell announcing the second coming of the Catastrophe, a blessing as they moved on into the future.

The girls, who should have been exhausted, moved into the office and drawing room of Raynesia's residence, holding a slumber party until afternoon. An epilogue that only Elissa knew.

Akiba Raid MAP



Guild Organization Chart

BIGGEST COMBAT GUILD IN AKIBA

D.D.D

[TOTAL MEMBERS]
1500 PEOPLE

THE LARGEST COMBAT GUILD THAT IS THE PRIDE OF AKIBA. IT IS BASED OFF MUTUAL ASSISTANCE AND DISCUSSION OF COMPLETING MAJOR RAIDS SINCE THE ELDER TALES GAME DAYS. IT'S FEATURE IS THE LARGE AMOUNT OF MEMBERS, PROVIDES PLENTY OF SUPPORT TO MAJOR RAIDS BEGINNERS. THE ORGANIZATION ARE AUTONOMOUS, WITH A FULL RAID LEADER IN CHARGE OF A 24 MEMBER GROUP, A LEGION RAID LEADER IN CHARGE OF 5 FULL RAID GROUPS (TOTAL OF 108 MEMBERS INCLUDING RESERVES). HIGHER UP THE CHAIN OF COMMAND IS THE GENERAL IN CHARGE OF 4 LEGION RAID GROUPS. THEY ARE ORGANIZED IN SUCH A WAY THAT EACH LEGION RAID CAN OPERATE INDEPENDENTLY EVEN IN THE ABSENCE OF KRUSTY.

[GUILD MASTER] - KRUSTY

[VICE GUILD MASTER] - VACANT (Drei-Klauen)

[MAIN RAID ARMY] - LEGION RAID X1 (110 MEMBERS + RESERVES)

[RAID BATTLE HQ] - TAKAYAMA MISA (Drei-Klauen)

[1ST RAID ARMY] - LEGION RAID X4 (480 MEMBERS + RESERVES)

[2ND RAID ARMY] - LEGION RAID X4 (480 MEMBERS + RESERVES)

[3RD RAID ARMY] - LEGION RAID X4 (480 MEMBERS + RESERVES)

[TRAINING CORP] - RIEZE (Drei-Klauen)

[INTEL] - YUMIKA

[RESOURCE MANAGEMENT] - RICHOU

[COMMUNICATION] - YUZUKO

[FACILITIES] - KITSUNE SARU



ギルド組織図

[GUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CHART]

戦闘系、生産系から中小ギルドまで、
ギルドはどのように運営されているの？

A WARM MID SIZED GUILD

CRESCENT MOON
ALLIANCE

[TOTAL MEMBERS]
61 PEOPLE

A FAMILY STYLE MID SIZED GUILD LED BY MARYELE, TRENDING TOWARDS COMMUNITY LIVING. ASIDE FROM COMPLETING THEIR OWN TASK, THE MEMBERS LIVE IN HARMONY TOGETHER IN AKIBA. A GUILD MANAGED BY THE DUO LADIES HENRIETTA IN CHARGE OF GUILD BUDGET AND EVER SMILING MARIELE.

[FINANCE] - HENRIETTA

[ACCOUNTANT] - HENRIETTA

[PURCHASING] - AIZEL

[SECRETARY] - ASUKA

[COOKING SECTION CHIEF] - GIROV

[BATTLE LEADER] - SHORYU

[NEWBIE CARETAKER] - SERARA

[SUPPORT SECTION] - MARYELE

[MARYELE'S CARETAKER]
HENRIETTA

[GUILD MASTER] - MARYELE



MINI GUILD OF SHIROE

LOG HORIZON

[TOTAL MEMBERS]
8 PEOPLE

THE IMPORTANT ISSUES OF THE GUILD ARE DISCUSSED IN THE NIGHTLY DINNER MEETINGS(?), BUT THERE ARE NOTHING THAT ARE REALLY PROBLEMS. MOST OF THEM ARE SETTLED BY NYANTA SAYING "I WILL TAKE CARE OF IT NYA~" AND SHIROE SAYING "SORRY TO TROUBLE YOU." THEY ARE CURRENTLY RECRUITING, BUT BECAUSE SHIROE IS SHY, SO PROGRESS IS SLOW.

[DINNER MEETING] - ALL MEMBERS PARTICIPATE

[PURCHASING, DINING] - CHIEF NYANTA

[CLEANING, MAINTENANCE] - MINORI & TOHYA

[ROOFTOP GARDEN & QUARTERMASTER]
- ISUZU & RUNDLHAUS

[BATTLE LEADER] - NAOTSUGU

[GUILD MASTER] - SHIROE
(IN CHARGE OF EVERYTHING ELSE)

[SPY] - AKATSUKI



BEAUTIFUL LADIES GROUP
LED BY SOUJIROU

WEST WIND
BRIGADE

{TOTAL
MEMBERS}
64 PEOPLE

KNOWN AS THE HAREM GUILD, A COMBAT GUILD COMPRISE MOSTLY OF FEMALE PLAYERS. WEST WIND BRIGADE IS A MID SIZED GUILD, BUT HAS A SISTER ORGANIZATION 'UNOFFICIAL GROUP SFC'. SFC IS AN UNOFFICIAL ORGANIZATION, SO THERE ARE NO INFORMATION ON THEIR ACTUAL NUMBERS. BUT EVEN PEOPLE OF THE LAND JOINS THEM, ITS RUMORED ITS MEMBERS HAS HIT 3 DIGITS. THEIR FESTIVE AND ELEGANT DAILY LIVES INCLUDE THE INTERACTION BETWEEN THESE 2 GROUPS, WITH DRAMAS AND UNDERGROUND AGREEMENT AND LISTENING TO THE SCHEDULES OF SOUJIROU'S DAILY ROUTINE AND ETC. EVERYDAY IS LOUD AND NOISY.

[GUILD MASTER] - SOUJIROU

[OPERATIONS] - NAZUNA

[DAILY LIVING SECTION] - HISAKO

[EXPEDITION SECTION] - KYOUKO

[ADMINISTRATIVE SECTION] - DOLCE

UNOFFICIAL GROUP SFC (SOU-KYUIN FAN CLUB)

[BOSS] - FOXY BIG SISTER (ANONYMOUS)

[STAR GROUP] - MASTER SUPPORT GROUP
(ANONYMOUS)

[MOON GROUP] - DOUBLE MOON★ROMANTIC FLASH
(ANONYMOUS)

[FLOWER GROUP] - SPINNING NOSE BLEED
(ANONYMOUS)



ELITE COMBAT ORGANIZATION

BLACK SWORD
KNIGHTS

{TOTAL
MEMBERS}
180 PEOPLE

ONE OF THE TOP RAIDING GUILDS IN AKIBA. IT HAS A ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE AND CHART, BUT THE MEMBERS ACT AS THEY PLEASE, SO IT IS ALMOST MEANINGLESS. HENCE, REZARICK HAS TO WORK ALONE TO MANAGE THE ADMINISTRATIVE WORK OF THE GUILD. BUT WITH THE RECENT ADDITION OF THE PEOPLE OF THE LAND SUPPORT DEPARTMENT, HE CAN FINALLY REST EASY. THE MOTTO IS 'GIVE IT YOUR ALL'. POLICY SUCH AS WEARING OF THE SAME CAPE DESIGNS ARE IMPLEMENTED PERFECTLY, AND IS POPULAR AMONG THE MEMBERS.

[GUILD MASTER] ISSAC

[CHIEF] ISSAC

[VICE CHIEF] - DON MASUDEI

[SPECIAL FORCE LEADER] - FREED

[SPECIAL ATTACKER] - YMIR

[GUERRILLA LEADER] - PAULUS

[SPECIAL GUERRILLA] - TOMONI

[PERSONAL GUARD LEADER] - ZEKKA EAGLE

QUARTERMASTER - REZARICK

[EXTERNAL ORGANIZATION,
BS SUPPORT TEAM]



THE ACADEMIC GUILD THAT PROVIDES
SUPPORT FOR FREE RESEARCH

THE RODRICK FIRM

(TOTAL
MEMBERS)
1900
PEOPLE

THE 2ND LARGEST GUILD IN AKIBA. IT IS A LARGE GUILDS SINCE THE TIME OF ELDER TALES, FOUNDED IN ORDER TO COLLECT ALL RECIPES. AFTER THE CATASTROPE, IT'S ACTIVITIES ARE STILL FOCUS AROUND RESEARCH. COMPARED TO OTHER PRODUCTION GUILDS LIKE OCEANIC SYSTEMS, THEY ARE FOCUSED ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, AND IS WEAK IN MANUFACTURING AND SALES. PARALLEL DEPARTMENTS NUMBERING FROM A FEW TO SEVERAL DOZENS ARE SET UP, FORMING THE VARIOUS BRANCHES WITHIN THE GUILD. THEIR ORGANIZATION IS SIMILAR TO A COLLEGE, SO THE ATMOSPHERE FEELS MORE LIKE A SCHOOL THEN A CORPORATE ENTITY.

[CHIEF] - RODRICK

[EXECUTIVE] - 5 MEMBERS

[BUDGET COMMITTEE] - 23 MEMBERS INCLUDING THE 16 DEPARTMENT HEADS

[OPERATION] - BRIAN HOLTZ

[ADMINISTRATION] - SEGAWA ICHIDE

[AFFILIATED LIBRARY] - CODEX

[RESEARCH]

[EQUIPMENT] - SANADA KAZUHIRO 21

[MECHANICAL FACILITIES] - SYUPRISN

ANOTHER 16 DEPARTMENT & 42 SECTION

[EXTERNAL RESEARCH]

[AFFILIATED HOSPITAL] - PHOSPORUS MANHOLE (TL: マンホールの隣)

[PEOPLE OF THE LAND CULTURE RESEARCH] - KIMUTAKE

[MOUNT FUJI EARTHQUAKE RESEARCH] - NAMAZUHIKE

[AGRICULTURAL COOPERATION CENTER] - HONOKA



BIG GUILD HANDLING EVERYTHING FROM
MANUFACTURING TO SUPPLY

OCEANIC SYSTEM

(TOTAL
MEMBERS)
5000
PEOPLE

KNOWN AS THE BIGGEST PRODUCTION GUILD IN AKIBA. WITH OVER 5000 MEMBERS, IT HAS REACH THE SCALE OF AN MANUFACTURING ENTERPRISE. IT IS HIGHLY ORGANIZED TO EASE PRODUCTION AND SALES TASK. THE LONG TERM PLANS OF THE GUILD ARE DECIDED BY THE EXECUTIVE MEETING THAT ARE HELD ONCE EVERY 2 MONTHS, BUT THE INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS ARE COMPLETED BY COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS. ASIDE FROM MANUFACTURING, THEY ARE ALSO MOVING INTO THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY AND DEVELOPING RELATED TECHNIQUES, EXPANDING INTO OTHER MARKETS GRADUALLY.

[GUILD EXECUTIVE MEETING] (GUILD EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD BIMONTHLY)

[SURVEILLANCE ROOM] - EXTERNAL SURVEILLANCE LEADER SHIROE

[GUILD MASTER] - MICHITAKA

[DEPARTMENT LIAISON] - TOMOKO

[MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT] - WAGTAIL

[ADMINISTRATION SECTION] - TANAKA YAMADA

[ACCOUNTANCY SECTION] - JYUBOSK

[HUMAN RESOURCE RECRUITMENT SECTION] - TAKUMISYU KORESHIN+

[OPERATION DEPARTMENT] - KINKOKU

[CARPENTRY SECTION] - GORO NYUDO

[CONSTRUCTION SECTION] - AMA+DEUS

[TRANSPORT SECTION] - IDANTE

[SUPPLIES SECTION] - MATSUKOI

[EXPEDITION ROOM] - AMUNZEN

[MANUFACTURING DEPARTMENT] - SANDAIME UEHARA

[ARMOR SECTION] - YOKOYAGI

[CONSUMABLES SECTION] - MASYUMARO

[HOME FURNITURE AND MAGIC SECTION] - TSUKUYOHIME





Fragrant green world, blue across the new, yet somehow old land. The imaginary world of HORIZON is home to dragons and gnomes, monsters and devils. With a burden weighing upon your soul, go forth. O winged one, achieve! Here, this land spreads out before you like a blank paper; make your mark on it!

[TERMINOLOGY]

▶ 世界観とテーマ

USING A SWORD AND MAGIC WORLD AS ITS THEME, IT IS THE LARGEST ONLINE GAME IN THE WORLD. WITH ITS PROUD 30 YEARS HISTORY, IT IS AN MMORPG LOVED BY ITS HARDCORE PLAYERS.

▶ 設定とロード

THE INCIDENT WHERE ELDER TALE PLAYERS ARE TRAPPED IN THE GAME WORLD, THE DAY THE 13TH EXPANSION PACK "THE NOVASPHERE PIONEER" WENT LIVE, ALL 30,000 JAPANESE PLAYER WHO WERE ONLINE WAS TRAPPED.

▶ 登場キャラクター

A TERM DESCRIBING ALL ELDER TALE PLAYERS, THE PLAYER'S OWN IDENTITY, YOU CAN SET YOUR HEIGHT, CLASS AND RACE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE GAME. IT IS MAINLY USED BY THE NPC WHEN ADDRESSING THE PLAYERS.

▶ アルティメットワールド

SHIROE AND THE OTHERS ARE TRAPPED IN ELDER TALE THAT HAS TURNED INTO THE ALTERNATE WORLD.

▶ ギルド

A GROUP FORMED BY MULTIPLE PLAYERS, MEMBERS CAN CONTACT EACH OTHER EASY TO GO ON ADVENTURES TOGETHER. IT IS EASY TO TRADE ITEMS TOO. MANY PLAYERS JOIN GUILDS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ITS CONVENIENCE.

▶ ギルドテーブルコンソール

THE GOVERNING BODY OF AKIBA FORMED UNDER SHIROE'S PROPOSAL. IT'S 11 MEMBERS INCLUDE THE GUILD MASTER OF BIG BATTLE GUILDS, MAJOR PRODUCTION GUILDS AND THE REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL THE SMALL GUILDS, LEADING THE REVOLUTION IN AKIBA.

▶ 100年クエスト

GUILD STARTED BY SHIROE AFTER THE APOCALYPSE, PIONEER MEMBERS ARE ADATSUKI, NAOTSUGU AND NYANTA. THE TWIN MINORI AND TOHYA JOIN SOON AFTER. IT'S BASE IS IN THE RURAL EDGE OF AKIBA, AN ABANDONED BUILDING THAT HAS A OLD GIANT TREE GROWING OUT OF IT.

▶ 魔法と魔法使い、魔法使いの魔法

LEAD BY MARYELE, IT'S A GUILD FORMED WITH THE PURPOSE OF SUPPORTING MID LEVEL PLAYERS. MARYELE'S GOOD FRIEND FROM HIGHSCHOOL, HENRIETTA ACTS AS ITS ACCOUNTANT.

▶ 世界観とテーマ

THE WAY NPC CALLS THEMSELVES, THEIR NUMBER HAS GROWN A LOT AFTER THE APOCALYPSE. THEY NEED TO EAT AND SLEEP. IF YOU DO NOT USE YOUR STATUS MENU TO CONFIRM, IT IS HARD TO DIFFERENTIATE THEM FROM OTHER PLAYERS.

▶ ハーフガリアプロジェクト

THE PROJECT ELDER TALE IMPLEMENTS WITH THE GOAL TO RECREATE THE WORLD WITH HALF ITS SCALE. ITS SHAPE AND GEOGRAPHY IS SIMILAR TO REAL EARTH, BUT THE DISTANCE HAS BEEN SHORTEN TO HALF, AND THE AREA IS ONLY A QUARTER.

▶ 古代文明

THE SETTING BY THE DEVELOPERS OF THE ONLINE GAME ELDER TALE, A TERM FOR THE FALLEN CIVILIZATION IN THE PAST. IT IS BASED ON THE REAL WORLD CIVILIZATION AND TECHNOLOGY. THE ABANDONED METROS AND BUILDINGS ARE THE LEGACY OF ANCIENT TIMES.

▶ デバウチェリーティーパーティー

A GROUP THAT SHIROE, NAOTSUGU, NYANTA STAY IN FOR A PERIOD OF TIME. IT WAS ACTIVE FOR 2 YEARS, BUT DID NOT OPERATE AS A GUILD, BUT IT IS A LEGENDARY ORGANIZATION IN ELDER TALE, AND IS STILL FAMOUS NOW.

▶ ファーヴンズ

TRANSPORT DEVICE LOCATED IN THE PLAINS. THE TRANSPORT LOCATION IS AFFECTED BY THE LUNAR CYCLE. IF YOU USE IT AT THE WRONG TIME THERE IS NO WAY OF KNOWING WHERE YOU WOULD GO. WITH SURFING THE INTERNET FOR GUIDES OUT OF THE QUESTION AFTER THE APOCALYPSE, ALMOST NO ONE CAN USE THEM.

▶ ノイズ

A UNIT TO DESCRIBE SURFACE AREA IN ELDER TALE. IT MIGHT BE A PIECE OF PLAIN, A DUNGEON, A CITY AND ALSO A SMALL AREA LIKE A ROOM IN THE HOTEL. CAN BE PURCHASE ACCORDING TO THE DISPLAYED PRICE.

▶ 魔法と魔法使い

THE WORLD NAME IN A GAME MADE BY "HALF GAILA PROJECT" EQUIVALENT TO "THE EARTH" IN THE REALITY WORLD.

▶ ステータス

A VARIETY OF ABILITY USABLE BY ADVENTURERS, CAN BE LEARN BY LEVELING UP MAIN CLASS OR SUBCLASS. ALL SKILLS CAN BE DIVIDED TO NOVICE, INTERMEDIATE, ULTIMATE AND SECRET THESE 4 LEVELS, CAN BE LEVELLED BY TRAINING THE SKILLS.

MAIN CLASSES

IT DECIDES THE PLAYERS' BATTLE ABILITY IN ELDER TALE. WHEN A PLAYER STARTS THE GAME, THEY CAN CHOOSE FROM 12 UNIQUE CLASSES, CATEGORIZED INTO WARRIOR CLASSES, WEAPON-BASED CLASSES, HEALER CLASSES AND MAZE CLASSES. THERE ARE 3 CLASSES FROM EACH CATEGORY, A TOTAL OF 12.

SUB CLASSES

HAVE NO DIRECT RELATION TO BATTLES, BUT A CONVENIENT SKILL TO HAVE WHILE PLAYING THE GAME. COMPARED TO THE 12 CLASSES, THERE ARE OVER 50 SUBCLASSES, FROM CONVENIENT JOBS TO JOKE SUBCLASSES, IT HAS A WIDE VARIETY MIXED IN.

AKIBA CITY

ONE OF THE PLAYER CITIES IN YAMATO. IT'S POSITION IS RELATIVE TO REAL JAPAN'S AKIBA.

CRESCENT ARCHIPELAGO YAMATO

THE WORLD OF SERGESEA IS BASED ON THE REAL WORLD. CRESCENT ARCHIPELAGO YAMATO IS EQUIVALENT TO THE REGION OF JAPAN, DIVIDED INTO EZZO EMPIRE, FOUPLAND DUKEOM, NINETAL DOMINION, LEAGUE OF FREEDOM CITIES EASTAL AND HOLY EMPIRE WESTELAND. THESE 5 AREAS.

CAST TIME

THE TIME NEEDED TO PREPARE BEFORE ACTIVATING A SKILL. IT DIFFERS FROM SKILL TO SKILL. POWERFUL SKILLS USUALLY HAVE LONGER CAST TIME. YOU CAN MANEUVER WHILE CASTING COMBAT SKILLS, BUT ANY MAGICAL SPELLS WILL BE INTERRUPTED IF YOU MOVE WHILE CASTING.

WOLIOZ BIZO

THE EFFECT OF UNABLE TO MOVE YOUR BODY TEMPORARILY AFTER USING A SKILL. UNABLE TO MOVE OR ACT UNTIL SKILL STIFFNESS WEARS OFF.

RECAST TIME

AFTER USING A SKILL, THE TIME NEEDED TO USE IT AGAIN. THIS RESTRICTION PREVENTS PLAYERS FROM SPAMMING A SPECIFIC SKILL. SOME SKILLS HAVE THE RESTRICTION OF USING IT ONCE PER DAY.

COOL DOWN

ONE OF THE BASIC SKILLS ALL ADVENTURERS CAN LEARN. CAN INSTANTLY TELEPORT TO THE LAST VISITED SAFE ZONE WITH A CATHEDRAL. HAVE A COOL DOWN OF 34 HOURS.

RAID

REQUIRES MORE ADVENTURERS THAN THE STANDARD PARTY OF 6 TO BATTLE, ALSO USED TO DESCRIBE A LARGE GROUP OF PLAYERS. MOST WELL KNOWN ARE THE 34 PLAYERS' FULL RAID AND THE 96 PLAYERS' LEGION RAID.

RACE

THE WORLD OF SERGESEA HAS ALL KINDS OF HUMANOID RACES. ADVENTURERS CAN CHOOSE HUMAN, ELF, DWARF, HALF-ELF, WERECAT, WOLF-PAN, FOXTAIL AND RACE OF CEREMONY. THESE 8 RACES, KNOWN AS THE KIND HUMAN RACES.

MAIN CLASSES

MAGIC ATTACK CLASSES



SORCERER

STRONG AT DEALING DIRECT DAMAGE TO OPPONENTS.



SUMMONER

STRONG AT SUMMONING AND MANIPULATING MYTHICAL BEASTS AND SPIRITS.



ENCHANTER

STRONG AT THE CONTROL OF BATTLE STATUS AND MP.

HEALING CLASSES



CLERIC

THE ULTIMATE HEALER BOASTING OF THE GREATEST HEALING ABILITY.



DRUID

A MAGIC-TYPE HEALING CLASS THAT ALLIES WITH THE NATURAL AND SPIRITS



KANNAGI

A PREVENTIVE-TYPE HEALING CLASS THAT BLOCKS OFF DAMAGE.

WEAPON ATTACK CLASSES



ASSASSIN

A PURE ATTACKER PROFICIENT IN THE USE OF DIVERSE WEAPONS.



SWASHBUCKLER

TAKES UP A GUERRILLA-LIKE POSITION. DUEL-WIELDING AND VERSATILE



BARD

A LIGHT-ARMORED WARRIOR FLUENT IN MANY "SONGS" OF MAGICAL EFFECTS.

WARRIOR CLASSES



GUARDIAN

WIELDS THE HIGHEST DEFENSIVE ABILITY AND ABILITIES THAT GATHERS ENEMIES BY AGGRO.



SAMURAI

USES JAPANESE-STYLED EQUIPMENT, AND WIELDS POWERFUL SKILLS.



MONK

A BALANCE CLASS THAT LACKS ARMAMENTS BUT EXCELS IN EVASION.

Log Horizon

Terminology

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{| class="wikitable" |- !colspan="4"|Main Classes |- !Magic Attack
Classes!!Healing Classes!!Weapon Attack Classes!!Warrior Classes |-
|Sorcerer
```

Strong at dealing direct damage to opponents. ||Cleric

The ultimate healer boasting of the greatest healing ability. ||Assassin

A pure attacker proficient in the use of diverse weapons. ||Guardian

Wields the highest defensive ability and abilities that gathers enemies by aggro. |- |Summoner

Strong at summoning and manipulating mythical beasts and spirits. ||Druid

A magic-type healing class that allies with the natural and spirits.

||Swashbuckler

Takes up a guerrilla-like position. Duel-wielding and versatile. ||Samurai

Uses Japanese-styled equipment, and wields powerful skills. |- |Enchanter

Strong at the control of battle status and MP. ||Kannagi

A preventive-type healing class that blocks off damage. ||Bard

A light-armored warrior fluent in many "songs" of magical effects. ||Monk

A balance class that lacks armaments but excels in evasion. |}

Character Popularity Ballot

THE GIRLS OF COCOA BROWN GUILD, FARMERS OF CHOUHI, VOLUME 4 PG 246, THE ONLY ADVENTURER WHO POINTED OUT WHERE KRUSTY WAS,

KRUSTY'S CAT, THE BEGINNER AT CRESCENT MOON WHO ENDS HIS SENTENCE WITH 'DESU', THE GIRLS OF CHOUHI'S TOWN INN, HARAKAZUHIRO SENSEI, DEMIKAS, MARQUIS KLIVA, CAPILIA, THE GROUP WEARING BLUE CAPE WITH SIMILAR BRAND WHO ARE THE FIRST TO ANSWER RAYNESIA'S PLEA, THE FEMALE CLERK IN LINSUNE, THE MIDDLE SCHOOLER WHO CONFESSED TO AKATSUKI, EVERYONE FROM TSUBAKIYA FIRM., THE ADVENTURER WHO ASKED FOR THE GM IN THE BEGINNING, THE 3 ADVENTURERS WHO STOOD UP FOR LINSUNE TO HELP, AKATSUKI BEFORE THE APOCALYPSE, THE WINGED KING, GOBLIN GENERAL, THE SUMMONERS FROM BLACK SWORD KNIGHTS WHO VISITED THE NEW HOME OF LOG HORIZON, AKATSUKI'S SISTER, MOUNTABLE GRIFFON, LONDARK, GRIFFIN, MR SHOJI MASUDA, THE BARD TOHYA HELPED IN BOOK 3 PG 57, THE HUNTER WHO SAW THE GOBLIN ARMY IN THE BEGINNING OF BOOK 3, GOBLIN KING, DEEP RED DRAGON, THE OMBUDSMAN SHIROE AND COMPANY VISITED ON THEIR TRIP BACK FROM SUSUKINO, THE YOUTH OF CHOUHI WHO ARMED THEMSELVES TO DEFEND THEIR VILLAGE FROM SAHLASIN, NAOTSUGU'S GRIFFON, THE DISCIPLE OF THE HUNTER WHO SAW THE GOBLIN ARMY IN THE BEGINNING OF BOOK 3.

TOUNO MAMARE'S COMMENT

THE TOTAL VOTES IS 5090, THANK YOU EVERYONE!

AKATSUKI IS THE CHAMPION. THE HEROINE IS STRONG. SHIROE WITH HIS GLOOMY NATURE IS ONE OF THE TOP FINISHER, NOT TOO BAD FOR HIM. THERE ARE EVEN FANS WHO VOTED FOR MAMARE AND MAMARE (YOUNGER SISTER), I AM VERY GRATEFUL!

THANK YOU....



第11位	TOHYA	119	vote
第12位	NAOTSUGU	116	vote
第13位	SHORYU	100	vote
第14位	MARYELE	89	vote
第15位	F TA-SAN	88	vote
第16位	CHARASIN	77	vote
第17位	ISUZU	67	vote
第18位	ISSAC	63	vote
第19位	RODRICK	47	vote
第20位	MICHITAKA	41	vote
第21位	WILLAM MASSACHUSETTS	37	vote
第22位	MAMARE (IMOUTO)	37	vote
第23位	REZARICK	35	vote
第24位	SOUJIROU	25	vote
第25位	ELISSA	18	vote
第26位	EINS	13	vote
第27位	SERARA	12	vote
第28位	LEONARDO	10	vote
第29位	RE GUN	9	vote
第30位	TOUNO MAMARE SENSEI	8	vote
第30位	LEECH	8	vote
第30位	RUG VERMILION	8	vote
第33位	RIEZE	5	vote
第34位	SAYAKA (KRUSTY'S LITTLE SISTER)	4	vote
第35位	柳八玉	3	vote
第35位	KANAMI	3	vote
第35位	比翼子	3	vote
第35位	THE PERSON CRYING WHEN EATING CRESCENT BURGER	3	vote
第39位	NAZUNA	2	vote
第39位	DUKE SERGEAD	2	vote
第39位	WOODSTOCK W	2	vote
第39位	AKANeya ICHIMONJI	2	vote
第39位	THE CHEF OF CRESCENT MOON	2	vote
第39位	THE OLD MAN THAT APPEARS AT THE BEGINNING OF VOLUME 9	2	vote

AKATSUKI

▶ TOTAL 1186 VOTE



[REASON] - BLACK HAIR IS NICE/I LIKE HER ACTIVENESS IN THE BACKGROUND/QUIET AND PETITE IS CUTE/ LIKE HER DEVOTION TOWARDS SHIROE

SHIROE



[REASON] - A NEVER SEEN BEFORE UNIQUE CHARACTER/ I LIKE HOW HE LOOKS WHEN HE THINKS/ THE GAP BETWEEN HIS PASSION AND VAINOUS SIDE

▶ TOTAL 852 VOTE

NYANTA



[REASON] - A DEPENDABLE GUY/ I WAS HEALED BECAUSE HE IS A COOL GENTLEMAN

▶ TOTAL 541 VOTE

MINORI



[REASON] - I LIKE HER FOCUSED NATURE/ SHE LOOK GREAT WHEN IMITATING SHIROE

▶ TOTAL 450 VOTE

RUNDELHOLM



[REASON] - I WAS TOUCHED WITH HIS FIGHT AGAINST DESTINY/ HANDSOME/ BECAUSE HE I LIKE HOT BLOODED IDIOTS

▶ TOTAL 209 VOTE

HENRIETTA



[REASON] - BECAUSE SHE IS A DEPENDABLE GLASSES WEARING BIG SISTER/ I LIKE HOW SHE HIDES HER FEELINGS.

▶ TOTAL 186 VOTE

TAKAYAMA MISA



[REASON] - COLD AND COOL/ I LIKE HER ILLUSTRATION.

▶ TOTAL 158 VOTE

NUREHA



[REASON] - VERY BEAUTIFUL/ UNBELIEVABLY SEXY/ I WANT TO FOLLOW HER

▶ TOTAL 154 VOTE

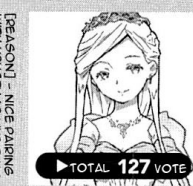
KRUSTY



[REASON] - WEARING WIDE FRAME GLASSES WITH A COLD CONTRAST WITH SHIROE

▶ TOTAL 134 VOTE

RAYNESIA



[REASON] - NICE PAINING/ I LIKE THE WAY THAT SHE IS ACTUALLY LAZY

▶ TOTAL 127 VOTE

CHARACTER POPULARITY BALLOT

ANNOUNCING THE RESULTS!!



THANK YOU EVERYONE FOR VOTING!!

THE TOP 5 ARE ALL DRESSED UP IN THE COLOR PAGES. MAMARE TOUNO'S OFFICIAL SITE (HTTP://MAMARE.NET) WILL PROVIDE THE WALLPAPER DOWNLOADS FOR THE TOP 5 CHARACTERS.

Afterword

This is Mamare Touno. Greetings, after a year and a half.

Wah, I'm sorry to have dragged so long, I think I'm becoming a lost sheep. The one who is lost isn't Akatsuki, but the author. Really, I should commit seppuku. To all my esteemed readers, I am very sorry, Mamare hopes to regain my pace in the future.

I am grateful to everyone for buying 'Log Horizon 6: The Stray Child of Dawn.' It's cold right now, but by the time this book reaches your hands, the weather should be turning warmer. So many things have happened. Maou Yuusha was animated, and there were many radio shows. Mamare got to know a lot of people! I'm very grateful.

Since Log Horizon is entering its second part, as promised, the heroine of the afterwords will change from Mamare (younger sister) to my editor F-ta chan.

In the end, the reason for changing the heroine is the popularity poll from Log Horizon 4. The result's were Mamare (younger sister) ranked 22nd, while editor F-ta chan ranked 15th. Though, ranking 15th is not very strong if you think about it as a 'mascot popularity contest.'

On the other hand, if you consider it in terms of a 'Touhou popularity contest' it is a great result. Compared to my sister's 22nd, it is a wide gap.

Mamare decided to jump on the bandwagon, changing the heroine and striving for victory. Not because of the psychological attack Mamare is suffering as a result of teasing Mamare (younger sister) too much. That isn't why, but it is important to avoid risk as an adult. I just wanted to make that clear.

I brought F-ta chan up, but the readers might not know who she is. She is the editor in charge of Log Horizon. A competent female editor with glasses, but she's very petite, like a polyester bottle; her race is mini-fairy. A carnivore. She will sit in seiza position during meetings, but she will jump up if she gets excited. She is a cute and competent editor, but a carnivore all the same.

That's not a metaphor, she really is a carnivore.

We went out to eat at a chain restaurant after a meeting, and I who knew my editor liked to eat meat casually asked "Aren't they having a hamburger

steak promotion period right now?". But she lectured me saying "Ground meat isn't real meat! Roar!" According to F-ta chan, all females like to eat meat. With that said, Mamare (younger sister) is the same.

One day, I had this conversation with F-ta chan.

"Someone wants to animate Log Horizon!"

"Oh?"

"It's NHK."

"That's pretty unbelievable."

"Isn't it? I think so too. No way they will animate it."

"Let's ignore that and work on something else."

"That's right, don't bother with this, want to eat some meat?"

And just like that, the news we ignored was addressed half a year later. We hung it out to dry and now it's ready. Log Horizon will be animated and premiere in Fall 2013. That's half a year from now, but production has already begun. The news should already be out when this book is published, right? Because it will premier nationwide, please take a look if it is convenient. If possible, I will be happy if you invite your siblings and family to watch together. There will be all sorts of projects coming up as well.

The Log Horizon publishing team has already started drinking in the bar. To be honest, everyone still can't believe that it was successfully animated, so we will hold a meat feast after confirmation.

Log Horizon 6 also includes my report of recent news.

In the world of soap opera, you will hear the lines 'I will be happy if I can be with you' very often. But Mamare thinks that it is hard to make true in the real world. If you want to interact with anyone, you will have to interact with the things that person is involved with, right? Like family, comrades, and friends. It feels like you have to interact with all these to truly be interacting with that person.

Akatsuki who only wanted to maintain her relationship with Shiroe so far is probably at her limit? In this situation, she has to face the people around her. That is the story in this volume. This is the girl's side story. Some

bonds need hard work to bind, that is the story of this book. Girls seems to love eating meat.

The equipment on the character featured at the beginning of each chapter are the results of fan submissions sent through February 2013. The ideas we used were from 291t0230fcarduus06 yebiusl、hakuhai、hpsuke、kane_yon+ Thank you all! Even though a lot of the submissions did not make it to publication, I am still grateful to all the netizens who participated. There are many new readers who submitted ideas, I hope to be acquainted with even more readers after the anime airs!

Those who like this series after reading Log Horizon, please come and visit <http://mamare.net>! It provides the latest news and updates of Log Horizon. You can also find out news about the manga adapation here as well, a major announcement is coming soon!

As we move to a close, I am grateful to chief publisher Masuda Shoji-sama, our master illustrator Harakazuro-sensei (Rieze's design is ingenious), the Tsubakiya company for the publishing designs, the editorial department and my female editor the petite F*ta-chan! Osako-san took great care of me this time too! Sorry for submitting my drafts so late!

Now, dear readers, please take your time and enjoy this novel!

Looking at the story board of the first anime episode of Log Horizon,

--Mamare Touno

References

1. ↑ Steel eating bug and White demon
2. ↑ TL: Kamahen-tenmoku -Furnace change heaven eyes.
3. ↑ Kuden
4. ↑ Shoden, Chuuden, Okuden, Hiden
5. ↑ TL: 'Ambrosia' = Invincibility, 'Theriaca' = status recovery and
 'Yomotsumike' = royal food for Hades
6. ↑ Stance of straight eyes TL: Seigan no Kamae
7. ↑ "Alraune", a flower humanoid creature

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Credits

Story : Mamare Touno
Illustrator : Kazuhiro Hara

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